

Leadership and Sensemaking *- a conceptual analysis*

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OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die vraag hoe organisatoriese leierskap suksesvol kan wees indien dit op basis van ‘sensemaking’ gekonsipieer word.

In hoofstuk 1 word ‘sensemaking’ bekendgestel as ‘n alternatiewe perspektief op leierskap.

In hoofstuk 2 word 8 leierskapsbeskouings ondersoek. ‘n Samevatting van hulle tekortkominge word aangebied.

In hoofstuk 3 ondersoek die tesis die organisatoriese konteks van leierskap

In hoofstuk 4 word ‘sensemaking’ teoreties uiteengesit

In hoofstuk 5 word die proposisie aangebied dat ‘sensemaking’-in-aksie die geskikte raamwerk vir organisatoriese leierskap is/behoort te wees

In hoofstuk 6 ontwikkel die tesis die konklusie dat deurdagte leierskap bereik kan word indien kernmomente van ‘sensemaking’ in leierskapsdenke en –praktyk ingebou word.

SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the question of effective organisational leadership as ‘sensemaking put to action’.

In Chapter 1 sensemaking is introduced as an alternative perspective for effective and efficient leadership. The need stems from the fact that the existing leadership theories are reductionist and superficial in nature.

In Chapter 2 eight leadership theories are identified and examined, namely, trait, behavioural, situational/ contingency, transactional, Great – Man, participative, transformational and power and influence theories. A summary is presented on their shortcomings and the need to explore alternative leadership perspectives.

In Chapter 3 the thesis investigates the organisational nature of the leadership context as the main reason why sensemaking is to be viewed as an alternative for effective leadership.

In Chapter 4 sensemaking theory is summarised. Central to the argument are the properties of sensemaking

In Chapter 5 the proposition that leadership is/should be sensemaking in action is set out. Leaders are identified as sense-makers; therefore, leadership is a process that evolves from the sense they make. The process of meaning making is presented as a gap in the existing leadership theories.

In Chapter 6 the thesis comes to the conclusion that thoughtful leadership is not found in the existing leadership theories but rather grounded in the process that underpins the interpretation of situations and the meaning-making process for appropriate actions. It is concluded that organisational incentives and promotions can be much more objective if they are based on the characteristics of sensemaking. Finally, it is recommended that sensemaking abilities should be assessed when appointing leaders, and sensemaking should be encouraged and made one of the criteria to assess organisational performance.

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SECI- Socialisation Externalisation, Combination and Internalisation

Chapter 1

Introduction - The Leadership Enigma

1.1 The Leadership Puzzle

For decades, leadership has remained a ‘buzz’ word in peoples’ vocabulary and every organisation such that one may easily assume that it is simply a concept and process. Everybody seems to understand what it is all about. Generally, it is a concept that is always associated with both individuals’ and organisational performance. Consequently, most organisations invest a lot of their resources on leadership processes characterised by activities that include strategic planning, capacity building, annual performance planning, risk management, monitoring and evaluation and performance appraisals. However, notwithstanding all these efforts on leadership processes, organisations continue to plummet into crisis after crisis, and all this is normally attributed to what is generally referred to as ‘lack’ of leadership. This is a paradox because there is no organisation that is without leaders and leadership systems in place. It means the availability of leaders and leadership processes does not necessarily translate into leaders’ par excellence and organisational success.

For many decades, research work on leadership has been phenomenal. The research work has yielded extensive literature and a wide spectrum of theories and models on leadership. However, the fact that there is both an on-going and unabated proliferation of leadership theories in place is somehow indicative of the reality that leadership, as a concept, is not as easy as it may sound. There is still a gap in the manner in which leadership has been conceptualised and put to practice. This leads to a great possibility that many people may not have been sufficiently helped by the existing leadership theories, and/ or the existing leadership

theories are not exhaustive of all the required and necessary elements of leadership. One, therefore, draws a conclusion that leadership remains complex and elusive.

The existing theories are not necessarily incorrect on their own more than being insufficient and, therefore, partial in highlighting the intricate processes inherent in leadership. Consequently, leadership remains elusive and an abstract concept that requires further in-depth analysis. For this to happen, an alternative approach that would be appropriately used to elucidate the concept of leadership further is required. However, the alternative approach should not necessarily add to the number of theories that are already in place. There is no need for both the proliferation of leadership theories and even pointing out to weaknesses on the existing theories. This has been done previously and has constituted the basis for the development of further theories. The gap that exists requires the re-conceptualisation of leadership. An insight into the re-conceptualised leadership will inform new ways of leadership practices in organisations at both structural and individual levels. Structural leadership levels refer mainly to organisational hierarchies whereas individual levels of leadership mainly focus on the role which individuals in different capacity levels play towards optimum organisational performance.

In fact, the increase in the number of theories on leadership has not improved organisational leadership nor simplified the leadership concept. One piece of evidence to that is what Perrow¹ frustratingly expressed when he said:

‘One is tempted to say that the research on leadership has left us with a clear view that things are far more complicated and contingent than we initially believed and that it may not be worth our while to spit out more and more categories and qualifications’.

There is concurrence of the same dilemma by Cummings² when he says:

‘As we all know, the study, and more particularly, the results produced by the study of leadership has been a major disappointment for many of us working within organizational behaviour’.

Both Perrow and Cummings do not argue for the further development of leadership theories. Moreover, they do not criticize the existing ones nor identify certain weaknesses, but they all point to the fact that there is more to be understood about the leadership concept than what has

¹ Perrow, C. 1972. *Complex Organisations: A Critical Essay*. III. Scott, Foresman.

² Cummings, L.L., 1981. Organisational Behaviour in the 1980s, *Decision Sciences*, Vol. 12, pp.365-377.

already been explained by existing theories. The leadership concept and subsequent practices remain elusive. What is missing is not attributed to the inadequacy of the explanation presented in the existing leadership theories but more to what would simplify and illuminate organisations' insight into the complex nature of leadership as a concept. This will help improve the effective functioning of organisations as effective leadership is most arguably a precursor for successful organisations. This means there is no necessity for another theory on leadership more than what can help to de-complex it for deeper insights and adequate application of the concept. This is the gap that this study attempts to examine.

The study identifies and argues for a theoretical framework that is not only grounded on human cognition but embeds cognitive dimension of leadership. The reason is that the existing leadership theories seldom approach the leadership concept from a view point of cognition. Therefore there is a gap in the existing leadership theories. This gap is identified in this study as a research problem and hence the research topic.

12 Research Question

The study identifies and advocates for the sensemaking theory as a novel theoretical framework within the leadership discourse, to help contribute towards solving the leadership enigma. But the sensemaking theory as propounded by Karl Weick³ is not proposed as another theory of leadership. In fact it is not a leadership theory. Nor is it a theory that targets select people or groups. It is rather a theoretical framework, which contains vital elements that are necessary and relevant for every leader in order to have deep insights in leadership. These elements are not exhaustive on their own but remain critical in providing more light towards effective organisational leadership. The valuable lessons from such elements can be used as a basis for a different and improved leadership perspective.

It is argued here that when such elements are understood and applied through the lens of the sensemaking theoretical framework, organisational leadership will not only be better understood but leaders themselves will improve on their leadership acumen. Thus, the sensemaking theoretical framework is examined as an approach to re-conceptualise the leadership process. What it brings to the leadership discourse is a *focus on the cognitive dimension* of decision making. Generally, there are very few leadership theories that approach

³ Weick, K.E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organisations*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

leadership from a cognitive perspective. Therefore a sensemaking theoretical approach brings a new dimension on leadership but especially organisational leadership.

The sensemaking theoretical approach is very specific in taking on cognition and through this approach the focus on leadership becomes even more unusual and yet relevant. As it will be shown in the thesis, sensemaking theory almost naturally links with the topic of leadership. Leadership is generally about decision making. All leadership activities imply that decisions have to be taken. Through the cognitive dimension sensemaking theory focuses on how people come to make such decisions. An insight into how people arrive at decisions is key in organisational leadership. Generally, life is about decisions and people often act upon, recognise, create, recall and apply patterns from the material of lived experience. Therefore, an insight into decision making is always through the lens of human cognition. Decisions are consequential to the cognition of people.

The reality is that presently there is no organisational leadership theory that is characterised by the elements of sensemaking theory. On the other hand, people on an on-going basis have to make sense of the realities out there to precede their actions or decisions. In fact it is inherent in peoples' natural ability to continuously make sense of everything around them. Sensemaking is their reality of social life. They too have to make sense of all organisational ambiguities and uncertainties. People always have to unravel the world of uncertainties as sense-makers. They are confronted by a dichotomy between what they expect and what they experience. Such a discrepancy and violation of their expectations is what often instills inquisitiveness to want to construct meaning for their comfort and degree of certainty.

At the same time the meaning they construct is not only what they transmit to others but also what informs their actions. In other words they become not only sense-makers but sense-givers too. People's actions inform and constitute or shape organisational leadership. This is particularly so because an organisation is its people. It is the sensemaking theory that explains the meaning making process by individuals and in organisations. In fact, it takes sensemaking to even construct the organisation the way it is and how it can influence and be influenced by its environment at the same time. It remains a central phenomenon in organisational activities and lies at the very core of leadership process. Without sensemaking the world would have become unreal, confusing and equivocal.

Even though sensemaking is both an abstract concept and phenomenon on its own, its theoretical framework is argued to be the key towards a deeper and improved understanding of

the organisational leadership. First, through this theoretical framework, an insight is given as to how people make sense through the interpretation and meaning construction of situations and objects before them. Second, an understanding of this framework will help leaders to re-think and re-conceptualise the leadership processes. Third, sensemaking theory induces a mind-set of leadership as an on-going process rather than an event. It starts but never ends. However, when and where it may start cannot be clearly defined because of its process and on-going nature. This sensemaking theoretical perspective brings an important element in organisational leadership discourse that leadership adapts and evolves at the same time.

Fourth, sensemaking theory elements permeate the current and existing leadership theories. Therefore, it means it is a necessary framework to be used for better understanding and application of the current leadership theories. Fifth, sensemaking underscores the fact that there is no single or plethora of leadership theories that can be an answer and a useful framework to understand what underpins human cognitive and sociological analysis of the reality out there. People continuously make sense and give sense to the perceived unfolding realities as they cannot live in a world of uncertainties. The sensemaking theory becomes relevant as it is not an organisational theory. Instead, it is rather regarded as a theory of all other organisational theories as it examines and explains how decisions are taken.

It is therefore only the sensemaking theoretical framework that provides lens for such a better understanding of leadership processes. When leaders have an insight into sensemaking, their leadership skills become enhanced. Furthermore, it will bring to organizational leadership coherence between individual actions, organizational influences, environment and the limits posed by the individuals in their own actions. Sensemaking does not bracket a particular behaviour into a specific leadership typology but rather diagnoses the philosophy behind the individuals' comprehension of situations. This is an approach to leadership that will make leaders ultimately to re-think about what leadership in essence is about in order to remain effective in their organizational leadership endeavours and re-conceptualise leadership. The study therefore explores how the insights into the sensemaking theoretical construct would contribute to the effective leadership in organisations.

13 Rationale

In arguing for a sensemaking theoretical approach to leadership discourse the study examines leadership as a cognitive process that is inevitably imbued with action, progress or transition

from one place to another and between individuals in an organised environment. In this context a process is defined as a way in which the movement or action is being shaped. The action can be in the form of ideas, decision making and persuasion. The processes and actions in varying situations are underpinned by a set of factors, which in this study include the seven properties, or characteristics of sensemaking. Sensemaking theory is proposed as an alternative framework for good organisational leadership.

The basis for choosing the sensemaking theory is not simply because it comprehensively covers everything on leadership. In fact, the theory is a partial theory. It is actually about a single moment in the whole chain of human cognition and action. It focuses mainly on that moment in the intelligence process when a person makes sense of a cue from a frame. When that is done the individual evaluates the sense that was made whether it was good or not and the consequential implications thereof. The process of evaluation is no longer sensemaking but only an action that somehow validates the sense that has already been made.

However, sensemaking particularly in Weick's version and insights is chosen because he applies it as both an analytical and diagnostic tool as opposed to a prescriptive dimension of decision making. In the context of this study, decision making is regarded as that cognitive process which serves as a springboard for the selection of a belief or course of action from a variety of possible alternatives. Such a course of action is often based on the values and preferences of the decision maker.

Given the fact that leadership is about decision making the Weick's insights into the analysis of sensemaking through the cognitive processes help in understanding about what informs and underpins the decision making. However, of critical importance is the fact that the sensemaking theory itself is not necessarily about leadership or a leadership theory. It is rather how the theory examines the human cognition through the analytical utilisation of various processes that include the seven properties of sensemaking. The analytical examination of human cognition provides a suitable theoretical framework that can be used for better insights into organisational leadership. For instance, Weick uses the seven properties of sensemaking to explain how people sometimes come to subjective understandings and at the same time why they differ from each other even when they go through the same or similar

experiences. A typical example for this is leadership during crises. People will always have subjective understandings and different responses and yet they are all experiencing the same situation. Even organisations do not respond to the same crises situations in the same way. Weick's perspective of sensemaking elucidates such a process.

But effective organisational leadership is not necessarily about the subjective understandings of situations even though this is the main crux of the theoretical construct of the seven properties of sensemaking. What is argued though is that an insight into such subjective understandings is necessary but not to serve as norm and a goal for organisational leadership. It is important to serve as a platform from which to take leadership discourse to higher levels. The study looks beyond the subjective understandings by using the analytical approach of human cognition as a tool to rise above the subjective prejudices that sensemaking activities normally create. In so doing, good and effective leadership is viewed as the ability to rise above subjective insights about situations. Such an ability to rise above subjective insights about situations is what is regarded as effective leadership. In other words, the sensemaking analytical tools are examined beyond Weick's context of analysis but as tools for the relative objective analysis of situations. It is believed that such relative objective analysis will result into better decision making which is fundamental in good organisational leadership.

For instance, in sensemaking Weick talks about cues from frames as part of the general meaning construction. However, in this study, the cues from frames are examined in the manner that would not only help improve organisational leadership but can be used to circumvent biases in understanding about situations. Chapter five of the study explains the importance of cues and frames beyond the subjective retrospection, identity construction and plausibility as examined by Weick. Cues and frames are examined beyond the seven properties theoretical construct but as instruments for good leadership. They are used as a diagnostic tool than a prescriptive tool of analysis.

The other example is that of autonomic arousal in organisations. Under normal circumstances, autonomic arousals are indicative of organisational chaos. The chaos management requires good leadership. In such instances, the sensemaking theoretical framework provides the increase in cues as a form of leadership intervention to circumvent any potential chaos in an

organisation. Even when the organisation requires a deep thinking on issues the increase in cues help to create an opportunity for participants to explore more possible options. Furthermore, the Weick's version of sensemaking discourages hierarchical organisational structures. The argument is based on the fact that every individual in an organisation makes sense of every situation that presents itself. If the individuals are sense-makers, therefore they have a role in leadership irrespective of positions. From this argument, there is a notion of distributed leadership that forms part of effective organisational leadership. Again this is elaborated in Chapter five of the study.

Therefore, leadership in sensemaking perspective is about how people in organisations construct meaning and enact reality. The constructed meaning and enacted reality provide context for decision making and the types of decisions individual may embark on. This sensemaking leadership perspective is based on the fact that organisations primarily exist in the minds of its members. The form of existence and the meaning thereof is not the same and hence peoples' insight into the ins and outs of the organisations is at different levels. Furthermore, this perspective recognises organisations beyond an amalgam of individual cognitions but rather a complex and dynamic process where members shape and are shaped by the events that unfold at the same time. In other words, as people enact the reality they too are enacted by the same reality.

In sensemaking leadership perspective it is the meaning that individuals make out of the situations that become a mechanism by which ambiguity is dealt with. Members in organisations make sense by first creating cognitive maps or schema of their experiences and thereafter construct meaning for an enacted reality. The cognitive maps help to provide a structure to frame experience in order to direct information storage and retrieval, impact efficiency and speed of information processing, fill in information gaps, provide problem solving templates and facilitate planning for the future. They occur consciously and unconsciously as they frame reality and inform decision making at the same time.

It is therefore argued in this study that first, leadership is about making sense of the situation at hand. The properties of sensemaking are identified as a partial framework, process and steps for understanding leadership process and are discussed as mechanisms for meaning making

towards decision making. In Weick's version they are defined as a set of philosophical assumptions, substantive propositions, methodological framings and methods towards reading, interpreting and meaning making for appropriate actions.

The partiality of the seven properties of sensemaking stems from the fact that in retrospect sense is made by subjectively selecting moments out of the past. The subjective selection of the moments of the past is not necessarily good leadership. Therefore any sensemaking based on such a process leads to subjective understandings of situations. A decision based on subjective analysis of the situation is not ideal for effective leadership.

However, notwithstanding the above identified limitations the properties of sensemaking remain significant in that they do not only provide possible tools of leadership analysis but also equally explain how actions are arrived at in different situations and circumstances. In other words, how individuals respond to situations before them is dependent on the sense they make of those circumstances. How they arrive at a particular interpretation and meaning making is what the properties of sensemaking explain.

Second, it is argued in this study that an insight into the intricacies of the sensemaking theoretical construct and its application will improve organisational leadership. It is pointed out that an understanding of the sensemaking theory will improve leadership particularly in areas such as constructive arguments, leadership roles, synergy and coordination and leadership as a cascaded function. The reasons to advance this argument are that first, organisational members are socialized into sensemaking making activities within a wider socialised and cultural organisational context. This makes organisations sense-makers. Second, sensemaking is a common thread in the multiple meanings of leadership. It is a complex interaction of the past, present and the future that is expressed in the talk of actors in an organisation.

In the context of this study, sensemaking is defined as the interlocked on-going plausible interplay between context and individual action⁴. This means sensemaking provides a precursor for decision making. It implies that individuals, irrespective of their traits, style and situations they face act on the basis of the sense they make of the situations and everything that surrounds them⁵. Equally so, people retrospectively interpret the present situation to find and

⁴ Weick, K.E & Daft, R.L. (1983). 'The Effectiveness of Interpreting Systems'. In: Cameron, K.S and Whetten, D.A (eds), *Organisational Effectiveness: A Comparison of Multiple Models*, Academic Press: New York, pp. 71-93.

⁵ Weick, K.E. (2008). 'Sensemaking'. In: S.R. Clegg and J.R. Bailey (eds), *The Sage International Encyclopedia of Organisation Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 190-208.

give meaning to it by a way of action.

For instance, people use their sense data such as sight, sound, touch, taste and smell to make impressions of unfolding events and then use cognitive capacities to make a pattern from data⁶. The sense made is not in isolation. Instead, people use cues to make sense such as past experience. They fit cues together to make meaning out of them⁷. This means everybody in an organization is both a sense-maker and sense-giver as they go about their organizational businesses. Sensemaking foregrounds visioning. In other words, it provides an insight to where individuals are and, at the same time, provides foresight.

14 Research Approach

In philosophy, *philosophical analysis* is a general term for techniques that involve breaking down philosophical issues. Arguably, the most prominent of these techniques is the analysis of concepts known as *conceptual analysis*⁸. In conceptual analysis, concepts are broken down and analysed into their constituent parts in order to obtain knowledge or a better understanding of a particular philosophical issue in which the concept is involved.

In this study, a conceptual analytical approach is used as a methodology in the analysis of the relationship between sensemaking and leadership⁹. The conceptual analysis research methodology allows for obtaining meaning from the concepts of leadership and sensemaking and thereby leads to the re-conceptualisation of leadership process. The conceptual analysis of properties of sensemaking, coupled with the theoretical construct of sensemaking, is used to underscore the importance of the re-conceptualisation of leadership. The ultimate objective in using the conceptual analysis as a method of inquiry is to contribute to the body of knowledge on ways in which sensemaking theory can be used as an alternative theoretical framework to underscore leadership discourse in organisations.

⁶ Weick, K.E. 2008.

⁷ Weick, K.E. 1995. *Sensemaking in Organisations*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

⁸ Beaney, M. 2003. "Analysis". The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

⁹ The body of method known simply as analysis and deriving from the work of Frege, Moore and Russell lay at the core of much twentieth-century Anglophone philosophy and its adherents to continue to exert a huge influence: see, e.g., Brian Leiter, "Introduction", In Leiter (ed.), 2004. *The Future for Philosophy*, Oxford; and Frank Jackson, 1998, *From Metaphysics to ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*, Oxford. Analytic philosophy has a broad scope and there is no single technique that could be claimed as the analytic method. One distinctive characteristic that is nonetheless shared by most philosophers in the analytic tradition is the belief that clarifying the meaning of the concepts can illuminate many philosophical problems that we use to think about and express those problems. This is the context in which "conceptual analysis" is to be understood in this study.

From this analysis are extrapolated views that gives light on leadership. Such views are further pursued to explore the contribution that a sensemaking perspective on leadership might make to more nuanced and effective leadership.

15 Delimitation

The thesis takes its theoretical departure point from the sensemaking theory of Karl Weick. Weick is selected because of the way in which he defines sensemaking using the seven properties of sensemaking and, in particular, the way he examines the implications of the seven properties within the organisational context. The theory is not examined as an organisational leadership theory but as a theoretical construct whose insights are applicable and useful to effective organisational leadership.

Leadership in this thesis focuses on both the individuals and groups within an organisation. This approach is informed by the fact an organisation is a social construct of individuals who function as individuals and as a collective. The role of individuals is, however, in tandem with the role of others to constitute a shared responsibility. That is why in Chapter five, distributed leadership is argued as one of the types of effective leadership. However, the detailed conceptual distinctions are clearly outlined below.

The use of sensemaking theory is, in itself, a delimitation. The sensemaking theory deals with a crucial cognitive aspect, but it is only one aspect of the overall cognitive activity of people. It focuses only on the moment that sense is made, but not on cognitive activities such as observing, interpreting and extrapolation. As such, sensemaking abstracts a single moment from an on-going cognitive process. The thesis does not attempt to cover all the cognitive activities. It would simply be inappropriate for one thesis to explore the ethical consequences, for example, or the cognitive dimensions of double loop learning which involves a study of human functions. The focus is deliberately on the sensemaking theory because it ties up very closely with decision making, which is key in a study on leadership. The sensemaking theory is a selected abstraction for the focus of the study.

In this study, there are no intentions to produce new models and theories on leadership. Leadership, as a concept, is neither replaced nor redefined. The existing and dominant psycho-behavioural approaches to leadership are not being replaced. Instead, a sensemaking perspective is proposed as a supplemental theoretical framework upon which leadership should be foregrounded within an organizational context for both leaders and followers. The sensemaking theoretical framework for leadership analysis is premised on the fact that amongst

the existing theories of leadership, there is no one that embeds this perspective. Furthermore, this perspective does not replace leadership theories out there instead, it imbues a better understanding of leadership as a process. The perspective will help leaders in organisations to go beyond the static nature of leadership and to leadership as a process that is dynamic and evolving.

Since there are many leadership theories, only a few have been identified and will be examined in this study as examples. The leadership theories chosen are examined to illustrate the fact that they are inadequate to explain leadership and none exclusively embeds insights from the sensemaking theory. These theories are situational/contingency theory, behavioural theory, trait theory, transactional theory, the Great Man theory, participatory theory, transformational theory and power and influence theory. However, the study is not based on a particular organization as a test case. Instead, the study examines leadership through the sensemaking theory. Even in the sensemaking theory, the focus is more on the properties of sensemaking and sensemaking in organisations.

1.6 Definition of Key Concepts

In the thesis, the following are the main concepts and, therefore, defined very briefly to illustrate their meaning and context within which they are used:

- a *Sensemaking*: This refers to meaning constructed from lived experiences in the world through the seven properties of identity construction, retrospective analysis, sensible environment, enactment, social context, recognition of events as on-going, focusing on and extracted cues and creating plausible cues;
- b *Sensemaking theory*: This refers to a theoretical construct imbued with elements that are fundamental to decision making by individuals and groups and serve as a precursor for effective organisational leadership;
- c *Leadership*: This refers to a social practice of decision making process which determines, informs and influences the behavioural action of a group or individual;
- d *Leader*: This refers to an enactor of a particular form of social reality with pre-conceived outcomes; and
- e *Follower*: This refers to an enactor of the pre-defined reality of social construct.

1.7 Thesis Layout

Chapter 1 of this thesis is the introduction. In this chapter, the study is introduced through

giving the study context, research question, rationale, research methodology, delimitations of the study and the definition of concepts. Chapter 2 focuses on the overview of general leadership theories. However, only eight (8) leadership theories are identified, defined and critically analysed. Chapter 3 deals with organisations as systems that are complex, learn, create knowledge and make sense. Chapter 4 deals with Karl Weick's sensemaking theory. Sensemaking is defined, and seven properties of sensemaking are identified and discussed within the context of leadership in an organisation. Sensemaking in organisations is also examined with a particular focus on belief and action driven processes of sensemaking. Chapter 5 focuses on the re-conceptualisation of leadership as sensemaking in action. Chapter 6 then draws conclusions of the study.

Chapter 2

Overview of Leadership Theories

21 Introduction

The term ‘leader’ came strongly to the public domain in the early 1300s even though it was conceptualized before biblical times¹⁰. However, leadership and the study of it can be traced from the origins of civilization. The Egyptian rulers, Greek philosophers and biblical patriarchs all had one thing in common, and that is leadership. Nevertheless, major changes in leadership were ushered in a change on how leaders would treat their followers during the Industrial Revolution era. The Industrial Revolution was characterized by a paradigm shift from an agriculture-based economy to an industrial one, which required new leadership approaches and skills for sustainable economic growth¹¹. Industrialisation embedded in itself the new technology that was accompanied by the mechanization of human thought and action, and this led to the creation of hierarchical bureaucracies¹².

Max Weber, a German sociologist, became one of the major contributors to this theory of leadership during the era of industrialization. His contribution was through making an observation of a parallel relationship between the mechanization of industry and the bureaucratic forms of organization¹³. He observed that the bureaucratic form routinized the

¹⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary* (The) 1933. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

¹¹ Clawson, J.G. 1999. *Level Three Leadership: Getting Below the Surface*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

¹² Morgan, G.1997. *Images of Organisations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

¹³ Morgan, G. 1997. p.17.

process of administration in the same manner as machines that routinized production.

However, Weber's concerns about organizational bureaucracy did not stop the further evolution of the bureaucratic form of leadership. Instead, classical theorists such as Henri Fayol and F.W Mooney advanced the advocacy for bureaucracy through organizational structures¹⁴. Classical theorists in leadership then set the basis for many modern management techniques such as management by objectives¹⁵. According to Peter Drucker¹⁶, management by objectives refers to a management approach wherein a manager's job is based on a task to be performed in order to attain the company's objectives. The manager is directed and controlled by the objectives of performance rather than by the supervisor.

Scientific management theorists, on the other hand, also contributed to the bureaucratic leadership theory. Their approach was heralded by Frederick Taylor who infused an engineering perspective into management with a view to engender strict controls, ruthless efficiency, quantification, predictability and de-skilled jobs¹⁷. The function of a leader through the scientific management theory was that of establishing and enforcing the performance criteria to meet organizational goals. Therefore, the focus of a leader was on the needs of the organization more than on the individual worker¹⁸.

What commonly underpinned both the classical and scientific approach to leadership was that organisations were viewed as rational systems that should operate in the most efficient manner in order to achieve the highest level of productivity¹⁹. Both theorists relied on the machine metaphor with a heavy emphasis on mechanization of jobs, dehumanization of organisations but failed to recognize organisations as complex organisms.

Even though hierarchical bureaucracy proved to be successful in mechanistic organisations, new theorists emerged in the mid-1940s. These post bureaucratic theorists put emphasis on the human as a critical factor in the future success of an organisation²⁰. They identified the

¹⁴ Bass, B.M. 1990. *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research and Managerial Applications*. New York: The Free Press.

¹⁵ Drucker, P.F. 1954. *The Practice of Management*. New York: Harper Collins.

¹⁶ Drucker, P.F. 1954.

¹⁷ Hersey, P. Blanchard, K.H, and Johnson, D.E. 1996. *Management of Organisational Behaviour*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

¹⁸ Morgan, G.1997.

¹⁹ Morgan, G.1997.

²⁰ Hecksher, C. & Donnellou, A. (eds), 1994. *The Post Bureaucratic Organisation: New Perspectives on Organisational Change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

importance of the relationship between the behaviour of a leader, follower satisfaction and organizational productivity and profitability. In essence, post bureaucratic theorists attempted to overcome the limitations of both the classical and scientific management theories by bringing in an emphasis of both the worker needs, role of a leader and work environment. This triad relationship was expressed through various research work such as the Elton Mayo's Hawthorn Studies²¹, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs²² and Herzberg-Environment and Worker Needs²³.

These leadership theorists grounded their argument on the relationship between an individual's performance and the satisfaction of needs. This became the basic tenet of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory²⁴ which argues that once a worker's physiological, security and social (intrinsic) needs are met, then productivity is enhanced. The leader's focus was, by so doing, re-directed towards workers' needs.

Herzberg's Dual Factor theory²⁵ extended Maslow's theory that employees' intrinsic and extrinsic needs should be met simultaneously if productivity is to be enhanced. Later on, leadership focus shifted away from the relationship between a leader's actions and the followers' satisfaction and productivity to behavioural concepts in the analysis of leadership in organisations. This leadership approach argues that peoples' performance is dependent on what the leader introduces to employees or followers. In other words, successful leadership can only be determined by good efforts of a leader to the followers in an organisation. By way of an example, Chester Barnard²⁶ identified an effective organizational leader as one who determines objectives, manipulates means, initiates action and stimulates coordinated efforts. In Chester Barnard's perspective, it is these behavioural components that constitute successful organizational leadership. In essence, the inclusion of behavioural factors to organizational

²¹ Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies focused on the work environment, role of leaders and the resultant impact to followers' performance. It was based on an assumption that human reaction to work environment and the role of leaders have great influence on work performance in the same way as the formal design and structure of the organisation.

²² Maslow, A.H. 1959. *New Knowledge in Human Values*. New York: Harper and Row publishers, Inc.

²³ Herzberg, F. 1966. *Work and Nature of Man*. New York: World Publishing CO.

²⁴ Maslow, A.H. 1959.

²⁵ Herzberg also came up with Motivation-Hygiene theory where as part of expanding Maslow-Hierarchy of Needs theory and further building upon the Dual factor theory foregrounded worker's performance on both hygiene and motivators. Hygiene refers to environmental factors such as working conditions and company policies. Motivators refer to factors that involve the job itself.

²⁶ Hatch, M.J. 1997. *Organisation Theory: Modern Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

leadership is about accomplishing goals with and through people²⁷.

The behavioural approach to leadership analysis led to the many dominant leadership theories that exist in the 21st century. The reason is, as Kuhn²⁸ puts it, that when there is a phenomenon that is not fully explained by an existing theory, a new theory emerges. The leadership concept has theoretically and practically evolved exactly according to Kuhn's²⁹ argument. The leadership evolution has moved beyond the planning, organizing and control mode of scientific management of the old economy in order to be aligned with the demands of the new economy of the knowledge society³⁰. However, none of these leadership theories are comprehensive enough to cover in a definitive way the individuals' and teams' role in an organization under different circumstances. Given the plethora of leadership theories out there, any attempt to cover all the old and new leadership theories remains a challenging and a daunting task³¹.

What seems to be central though in these varying existing dominant leadership perspectives is the issue of style and philosophy. A leadership style refers to a particular and relatively narrow behaviour attributed to those in leadership positions. This is an activity or role based phenomenon of leadership. A leadership philosophy refers to an approach in leading which is value and belief driven or centered. It is a way of thinking and acting at the same time.

Both the leadership style and the standpoint of an individual have influenced the determination of the existing plethora of leadership theories. Some individuals perceive leadership from a style standpoint such as the transformational leadership. Others view leadership from a philosophical perspective such as the servant leadership. These leadership standpoint perspectives result into fundamental differences in leadership perspectives even though people's views may be similar or overlapping. This would mean that sometimes, leadership perspectives are influenced by the positions upon which an individual looks at things. This explains why, below, there are varying leadership definitions.

22 Definitions of the Leadership Concept

Drawing on these existing leadership definitions is by no means an attempt to have a single definition of leadership. It is also not an attempt to do a comparative analysis of leadership

²⁷ Barnard, C.I. 1968. *The Function of the Executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

²⁸ Kuhn, T.S. 1970. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

²⁹ Kuhn, T.S. 1970

³⁰ Roodt, A. The Soul of Leadership. *Management Today*, August 2005, pp. 6-7.

³¹ Clegg, et al. 2011

definitions but rather, an attempt to advocate for the recognition of the leadership concept as a hugely complex phenomenon which cannot be attributed to one situation, a narrow view, personality trait, transaction and behaviour or action, and most importantly, not the other. In other words, leadership cannot be attributed to one particular behaviour or action only and not the other. Secondly, leadership is re-defined in order to show gaps in the existing definitions and, therefore, justify a need for a comprehensive leadership discourse.

Katz and Kahn³² looked at some of the existing leadership definitions and came to a conclusion that leadership is commonly viewed as the attribute of a position, the characteristic of a person and the character behaviour. As the attribute of a position, they argue that it is one's level of position that determines an individual's leadership capability. In other words, leadership capacity is classified according to positions. Through this perspective, the higher the position an individual occupies, the greater the leadership capabilities the individual possesses. In terms of the characteristics of an individual, Katz and Kahn³³ argue that leadership is dependent on the traits the individual has. Such traits may include a person's weight, height and intelligence. On the aspect of leadership viewed from a perspective of a character's behaviour, Katz and Kahn³⁴ argue that leadership is a creation of situations. In other words, it is situation centered, and it is these varying situations that create different leaders.

However, according to Choo,³⁵ leadership is about a decision-making process which initiates and influences the individual towards acting in a particular way in an organization. This leadership perspective is broad and does accommodate various situations and environments where leadership has to be exercised. Nonetheless, this view does not explain what informs a particular decision process as opposed to the other. The reality is that two individuals in different organisations may be presented with the same situation that requires decision making but arrive at different decision making processes. An example of such could be a crisis situation. This is the piece that is missing in the leadership discourse, and this study is an attempt to provide that piece of the leadership puzzle.

³² Katz, D. & Kahn, R.L. 1978. *The Social Psychology of Organisations*, 2nd ed. New York: Wiley, pp. 527-528.

³³ Katz, D. & Kahn, 1978

³⁴ Katz, D. & Kahn, 1978

³⁵ Choo, C.W., 1996. The Knowing Organisation: How Organisations Use Information to Construct Meaning, Create Knowledge and Make Decisions. In: *International Journal of Information Management*, Vol. 16, No. 5, pp. 329-340.

Clegg et al.³⁶ have broadened the definition of leadership beyond an individual's position and personality traits³⁷ to include social relations and skills between people and not inanimate objects. This leadership perspective is neither broad nor prescriptive. It does not say what leadership is except what it is about. Of critical importance in this leadership view is a relational and skills based aspect between individuals in an organization. There is, therefore, an aspect of human involvement that is dominating the discourse of leadership in this perspective.

This leadership perspective is congruent with Karl Weick's³⁸ leadership view which sees leadership as a social influence and, therefore, disregards a uniform approach which tends to confine and limit leadership to this and not that. Underpinning this broad leadership perspective are two important themes, namely, systems and variety. Based on this view of leadership as a social system, Karl Weick³⁹ argues that a leader has to be complicated as the organizational environment is complicated. Both these themes are elaborated in the preceding chapter.

Based on the variety of leadership perspectives, a number of theories and models were developed at different stages of civilization. In the main, leadership theories have evolved around work, work environment, worker motivations, leaders, managers, leadership styles and a myriad of other work-related variables for the past two centuries. Consequently, over time, organisations have evolved from authoritarian styles to more worker-friendly styles of leadership. From the plethora of existing leadership theories, only eight leadership theories are identified and examined in this study. They are trait, behavioural, situational/ contingency, great-man, participative, transactional, transformational and power and influence theories.

But notwithstanding the already existing theories, Milner⁴⁰ argued that the concept of leadership should be abandoned, at least temporarily, because of its limited utility in helping to understand organizational behaviour. However, this gloomy picture began to change gradually from the 1980s as a result of the incursion of qualitative research in the field of leadership⁴¹. The incursion of qualitative

³⁶ Clegg, et al. 2011

³⁷ Katz, D.; Kahn, R.L. 1978

³⁸ Weick, K.E. 2008

³⁹ Weick, K.E. 2008

⁴⁰ Milner, J.B., 1975. The Uncertain Future of the Leadership Concept: An Overview. In: J.G. Hunt, and L.L. Larson (Eds), *Leadership Frontiers*. Kent, OH: Kent University Press.

⁴¹ Avolio, B.J., Sosik, J.J., Jung, D.I. and Berson, Y. 2003. Leadership Models, Methods and Application. In: W.C Borman, D.R. Ilgen and R.J. Klimoski, (Eds). *Handbook of Psychology, Industrial and Organisational Psychology*, Vol. 12, pp. 277-307, New York: Wiley.

research in leadership helped to uncover some of the complexities with respect to organizational behaviour even though the understanding of leadership remained problematic.

Bennis⁴² on one hand, views the concept of leadership as highly rated and usually tossed around by people in society such as business, politicians and society in general whenever what is required is great performance. In other words, leadership is causally related to organizational performance. This affirms a belief that the rise and fall of organisations depends on leadership performance. Lombardo and McCall⁴³ argue that even the very mention of the word *leadership* elicits a perceptible aura of excitement which is almost mystical in nature. That is why the concept of leadership has become a ‘buzz’ word in both organizational and non-organisational circles.

This means there is great importance attributed to leadership fundamentally expressed theoretically and by word of mouth. Consequent to the strategic importance of leadership, some organisations even invest largely in hiring and developing leadership programmes whilst using technology to support and enhance leadership initiatives. Various academic institutions have mounted short courses, programmes and full qualifications on leadership. What remains lacking is not only a coherent understanding of leadership but what exactly one means by leadership.

Clegg et al.⁴⁴ attest to this view that even though so much is written and said about leadership, it remains elusive and problematic as a concept. It has become unnecessarily complex, confusing and contradictory sometimes. Furthermore, Clegg et al.⁴⁵ argue that the leadership concept and practice is, arguably, one of the most over-emphasized, over-researched and empirically messy areas of management and organization theory with a clear lack of unity of perspectives and approaches. In diagnosing the intricacies that mire leadership, Lombardo and McCall⁴⁶ have identified three things about literature and other materials on leadership, namely:

⁴² Bennis, W.G. 1959. Leadership Theory and Administrative behaviour: The Problem of Authority. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 4, pp. 259-260.

⁴³ Lombardo, M.M and McCall, M.W., Leadership. In: Michael M. Lombardo and Morgan W. McCall. *Leadership: where else can we go?* Durham: N.C.

⁴⁴ Clegg, S., Komberger, M., Pitsis, T., 3rd ed. 2011. *Managing and Organisations: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. California: Sage.

⁴⁵ Clegg et al. 2011.

⁴⁶ Lombardo, M.M and McCall, M.W, 1978.

- The mind-boggling number of un-integrated models, theories, prescriptions and conceptual schemes;
- The fragmentary, trivial, unrealistic or dull literature; and
- The research results that are characterized by Type III errors (solving the wrong problem precisely) and contradictions.

It is this elusive and slippery nature of leadership that has led to the invention of endless proliferation of terms but still, the concept of leadership is not sufficiently defined⁴⁷. Stogdill,⁴⁸ after conducting a review and analysis of more than three thousand books and articles on leadership with a view to finding answers to the leadership enigma, failed to produce an integrated understanding of the leadership concept. Instead, Stogdill⁴⁹ prefaced his book on leadership with tartly comments which are an indication of a need to demystify the leadership concept. Leadership theories and models have failed to elucidate the leadership concept⁵⁰. Instead, what literature reveals through leadership theories and models is that leadership is foregrounded on individual personality traits, situations people face, an individual's behaviour and innate abilities.

Clegg et al.⁵¹ have identified the following leadership theories, namely: trait, behavioural, situational/ contingency, great-man, participative, transactional, transformational and power and influence theories. All these theories are examined in detail below.

⁴⁷ Bennis (1959) in fact summarised the argument that the lack of consensus in this whole area of leadership and authority cannot be blamed on reluctance by social scientists to engage in empirical research on projects related to these topics. In fact, the problem is not so much that there is little evidence, but that the mountain of evidence which is available appears to be so contradictory that some of the theorists have radically modified their own points of view in the course of their writings on the subject of leadership.

⁴⁸ Stogdill, R.M. 1974. *Handbook of Leadership*. New York: Free Press.

⁴⁹ Stogdill (1974) prefaced the *Handbook of Leadership* as follows: Four decades of research on leadership have produced a bewildering mass of findings. Numerous surveys of special problems have been published, but they seldom include all the studies available on a topic. It is difficult to know what, if anything, has been convincingly demonstrated by replicated research (p. vii).

⁵⁰ Stogdill (1974) says that as one surveys the path leadership theory has taken, one spots the wreckage of "trait theory", the 'great man' theory, and "situationist critique" leadership styles, functional leadership, and finally, leaderless leadership. Other leadership types include democratic-autocratic-laissez-faire leadership, charismatic leadership, bureaucratic leadership, group-centered leadership, reality-centered leadership and leadership by objectives.

⁵¹ Clegg et al. 2011.

23 Types of Leadership Theories

2.3.1 Trait Theory

The trait based leadership theory's ideas were first advocated by Thomas Carlyle and Francis Galton in the mid-1800s. The theory was born out of reflection on the patterns and practices of leadership of the mid-1800s. At the time, leaders rarely rose through ranks compared to modern times. Organisations were extremely slow to change while traditions and convention were powerful features of all organized work and governing systems. The economy, society, industry, work and life itself were all less dynamic and fluid than these days.

In actual fact, in the mid-1800s, leaders were born into their respective roles. Women were effectively barred from any leadership role until the early 1900s. The ideas of this theory remained virtually unchallenged for around a hundred years when only in the mid-20th century, more modern ways of researching leadership uncovered some inconsistencies in the trait-based ideas.

According to the trait theory, leadership is perceived as traits or characteristics of an individual. A characteristic of individual is defined as the quality of the human behaviour. The theory assumes that leadership is rooted in characteristics possessed by certain individuals. Based on this assumption, leadership in the trait theory is defined as an innate, instinctive quality that an individual is born with. If not, then the individual is not a leader. These traits are dependent on certain demographic and personality characteristics such as age, gender, height, weight.

Barker⁵² argues that it is these demographic and personality variables that differentiate exceptional leaders from mere mortals; thus, he refers to it as a 'great-person theory' as discussed below. Leaders are only those with a predisposition towards leadership. House⁵³ et al. take the argument further that the difference between those who emerge as outstanding leaders and those who are destined to be followers is an undying drive for achievement, honesty, integrity and an ability to share and motivate people towards common goals.

What makes the traits theory not to fully provide a comprehensive explanation of leadership is that in reality, there is no evidence that personality traits do, in fact, distinguish leaders from followers. There is no universally acceptable evidence that those who possess the personality traits in this theory indeed have become leaders. Instead, there are plenty of people who possess

⁵² Barker, R.A. 2001. 'The Nature of Leadership'. *Human Relations*. Vol 54, pp. 469-494.

⁵³ House, R.J. Shane, S.A. and Herold, D.M. 1996. 'Rumors of the death of dispositional research are vastly exaggerated'. *Academy Management Review*, Vol 21, pp. 203-224.

these traits but are never perceived as leaders nor occupy leadership positions. Even the combination of these traits does not guarantee that an individual is a successful leader. What needs to be borne in mind is that traits are external behaviours borne out of what goes on in one's mind. In fact, most character traits are as a result of social norms and culture.

The trait theory disregards the dynamics of learning and change. It does not consider the situational factors and followers' effectiveness. According to Zaccaro⁵⁴ the following shortcomings are noticeable in the trait theory, namely:

- It neglects cognitive abilities, motives, values, social skills, expertise and problem-solving skills;
- It does not consider patterns or integration of multiple attributes;
- It does not distinguish between those leader attributes that are generally not malleable over time and those that are shaped by and bound to situational influences; and
- Finally, it does not show how stable leader attributes account for the behavioural diversity necessary for effective leadership.

2.3.2 Behavioural Theory

In response to the early criticisms of the trait approach to leadership, theorists began to research leadership as a set of behaviours by evaluating the behaviour of successful leaders, determining behaviour taxonomy and identifying broad leadership styles⁵⁵. The emphasis was on what leaders do as opposed to their traits or source of power. This approach to leadership research took place between the 1950s and 1960s. Leadership was thus defined as a subset of human behaviour⁵⁶.

This became a major progress in leadership theory because it enjoyed strong empirical support and was easy to implement to improve leadership⁵⁷. Central to the behavioural theory is that leadership capability can be learned rather than being inherent. It is rooted in actions of leaders and not on mental qualities. This brought the notion that leaders are made through efforts and

⁵⁴ Zaccaro, S.J. 2007. 'Trait-based perspectives of leadership'. *American Psychologist*, vol. 62, pp. 6-16.

⁵⁵ Spillane, J.P., Deamond, R.J. 2004. 'Towards a theory of leadership practice'. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 36 (1), pp. 3-34.

⁵⁶ Hunt, J.G and Larson, L.L (eds.). 1977. *Leadership: The Cutting Edge*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.

⁵⁷ Fleishman, E.A. and Harris, E.F. 1962. "Patterns of Leadership Behaviour Related to Employee Grievances and Turnover". *Personnel Psychology*, Vol. 15, pp. 43-56.

hard work. The aspect of hard work was recognized as part of what distinguished a leader from others. As part of ensuring hard work, training was identified as a necessity for leaders. Individuals needed to be trained to become effective leaders.

The behavioural theory has been applied in different work environments to improve leadership. For instance, it has been used to analyse differences in behaviours between poor and effective leaders⁵⁸. It was also adapted and applied for management in organisations through a Managerial Grid Model which uses a 9 X 9 grid with consideration behaviour marked along one axis and the initiating structure behaviour marked along the other. The model suggests that most effective leaders will be rated 9 on both of these behaviours⁵⁹. Even to the Theories of X and Y, the behavioural leadership theory has been applied where Theory X states that people are passive and therefore must be directed and extrinsically motivated to serve organizational needs. In Theory Y, people are already intrinsically motivated and need only proper working conditions⁶⁰.

The challenge with the behaviour theory is that it focuses on observable behaviour. This means that unobservable intentions are ignored. It fails to explain what makes a person behave in a particular manner as opposed to the other. For instance, if two people are faced with the same situation, chances of them acting differently are very high. The behaviour theory fails to provide an explanation for this. Unobservable intentions can only be known through social cues, and these can be masked behind observable behaviour. Observable behaviour also lacks a cut-off to establish when it is not-leader oriented.

2.3.3 Situational/ Contingency Theory

The mid-1960s to the mid-1980s were characterized by an unprecedented social change. This social change caused remarkable societal shift from the increasing economic wealth to ensuring social rights and equality. On the one hand, the advent of technology was shifting employee requirements from brawn to brains. This made leadership to become more intricate and complex. Leaders had to focus and deal with constituencies from within and outside their

⁵⁸ Yukl, G.A. 1989. *Leadership in Organisations* (2nd ed.). New York: Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs.

⁵⁹ Blake, R.R. and Mouton, J.S. 1978. *The New Managerial Grid*. Gulf: Houston.

⁶⁰ McGregor, D. 1966. *Leadership and Motivation*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

organisations in order to survive⁶¹. According to Vanourek,⁶² this is what is referred to as the multilateral brokerage where leadership is about employees, local community, vendors, shareholders, customers and leaders themselves.

It was this change and realization of the intricate and complex internal and external environment of the organisations that some researchers began to see leadership as being dependent or contingent upon situations or circumstances that leaders operate at and the environment organisations exist in. There was growing realization that due to the complexity of organisations and their environments, leaders do more than act but most importantly, do react to specific situations. Consequently, Hersey and Blanchard⁶³ proposed a situational/contingency theory in which they argue that leadership is contingent on a behavioural variable which is foregrounded on two interrelated maturity factors, namely, job and psychological maturity⁶⁴. Job maturity relates to relevant tasks, technical knowledge and skills. Psychological maturity relates to the subordinate's level of self-confidence and self-respect. The argument here is that an employee with a high level of job and psychological maturity is self-reliant and therefore requires little or no supervision whereas if both the job and psychological maturity levels are low, then hands-on supervision becomes imminent.

Initially, this theory was first introduced as the Life Cycle theory of leadership but was renamed in the mid-1970s as the Situational/Contingency theory. The fundamental underpinning of the Situational/Contingency theory is that there is no single best style of leadership. It assumes that a person's actions cannot be pre-determined but are dependent on the situation. What a leader does is contingent upon the characteristic of the situation in which the individual functions. The leader has no influential role in determining the course of action, but situations do influence leaders to take actions.

Gareth Morgan⁶⁵ describes the four main ideas that underlie the situational/contingency as follows:

— Organisations are open systems that need careful management to satisfy and balance

⁶¹ Vanourek, R.A. 1995. Servant-leadership and the future. In L.C Spears (ed.), *Reflections on leadership: How Robert K. Greenleaf's theory of servant-leadership influenced today's top management thinkers*. Pp. 298-308, New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

⁶² Vanourek, R.A. 1995

⁶³ Hersey, P., Blanchard, K.H. & Johnson, D.E. 1996. *Management of Organisational Behaviour*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hill.

⁶⁴ Yukl, G. 2002. *Leadership in Organisations*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

⁶⁵ Morgan, G. 1997

internal needs and to adapt to environmental circumstances.

- The best way of organizing is only dependent upon the kind of task or the environment one is dealing with;
- Management must strive to find an alignment and good fit between one's action (leadership style) and the task at hand (favourableness of the situation); and
- Different leadership styles are needed in different types of environment.

Therefore, effective leadership is rather task-relevant. Successful leaders are those that adapt their leadership style according to varying situations at hand. Anecdotally, there is merit in this argument. However, leadership does exist even before certain situations come to play. The theory assumes that different situations call for different characteristics. This means there is no psychographic profile of a leader. Instead, the theory assumes that what an individual actually does when acting as a leader is largely dependent upon characteristics of the situation in which the individual functions.

However, the Fielder's Contingency theory came up with different assumptions from Hersey and Blanchard's Contingency theory. The Fielder's Contingency theory argues that leaders are less flexible in their ability to change their behaviour based on follower's maturity⁶⁶. This theory posited that leader effectiveness is determined not by the leader's ability to adapt to the situation but by the ability to choose the right leader for the situation. However, the theory does not explain as to who would be responsible for making this choice. Some leaders are simply better for specific situations than others, and the situations determine the identified leader's success.

2.3.4 Transactional Leadership Theory

In the late 1970s, the leadership theory research moved beyond focusing on various types of situational supervision as a way of improving organizational performance⁶⁷ to a transactional leadership theory. The transactional leadership theory remained one of the preferred leadership theories in most organisations⁶⁸ in the 1990s. Its focus was on ways to manage the status quo and maintain the day-to-day operations of a business but not on identifying the organisations

⁶⁶ Hughes, R.L., Ginnett, R.C. & Curphy, G.J. 1993. *Leadership: Enhancing the lessons of experience*. Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc.

⁶⁷ Behling, O. & McFillan, J.M. 1996. A syncretical model of charismatic/ transformational leadership. *Group & Organisational Management*, Vol. 2, pp.163-191.

⁶⁸ Avolio, B.J., Walderman, D.A. & Yanimarina, F.J. 1991. Leading in the 1990s: The four is of transformational leadership. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, Vol. 15, pp. 9-16.

directional focus and how employees can work towards these goals and increase productivity in alignment with these goals. Transactional leaders lead through specific incentives and motivate through an exchange of one thing for another.

The underlying philosophy of this leadership model is that leaders exchange rewards for employees' compliance, a concept based on bureaucratic authority and a leader's legitimacy within an organization. These transactions are a method by which an individual gains influence and sustains it overtime. The process is based on reciprocity. Leaders do not only influence followers but are also influenced by their followers. However, the challenge with this theory is that it does not take the entire situation, employee or future of the organization into account when offering rewards⁶⁹.

2.3 5 The Great Man Theory

The Great Man theory of leadership was formulated through the analysis of behaviours of mainly military figures in the 19th century⁷⁰. At the time, authoritative positions were held solely by men from father to son, hence the name. The theory was made prominent through the work of a historian by the name of Thomas Carlyle. His main argument when propagating the Great Man theory is that the history of the world is but the biography of great man. Leaders are born and not made and possess certain traits which distinguish them from others. Therefore, a leader is the one gifted with unique and outstanding qualities that attract and convince the masses. The theory portrays great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed.

It is these outstanding qualities that make great men to assume positions of power and authority. The theory further suggests that all great leaders share these intrinsic characteristics regardless of when and where they live and the role they play. However, with the emergence of many great women leaders as well, the theory has been renamed as the Great Person theory.

The Great Person theory has suffered criticism like most theories, especially around its tenets. Some of the arguments are that great leaders are not necessarily born but are a product of the social context. It is the society that shapes these great men as opposed to them shaping the society. The theory fails to explain how one can be a great leader other than being born a great leader. Furthermore, the theory does not explain what it means to be a great leader except

⁶⁹ Crosby, P.B. 1996. *The absolutes of leadership*. Unpublished manuscript. Regent University.

⁷⁰ Yukl, G. 2002.

attributing greatness to positions of authority or power.

2.3.6 Participative Theory

The Participative leadership theory suggests that an ideal leadership style is the one that makes everyone a role player. Each individual is taken into account. Participation is encouraged at both individual and group levels. The individual's participation leads to collective decision-making process. It is a theory which encourages leaders to retain the right to allow for the input of others in two ways, namely, representative and participatory management. In representative participation, a group of employees gets involved in organizational decision making whereas in participatory management, subordinates would share a degree of joint decision making with their immediate supervisors. This helps to address employees' higher-level needs according to Abraham's Maslow hierarchy of needs. It is also important for power sharing as employees redistribute power that makes them true stakeholders in an organization and have a voice.

The Participative leadership theory is based on respect and engagement. It constructively focuses energy in every human to human encounter. It harnesses diversity, builds community and creates shared responsibility for action. Leaders make people feel valued when they are made an integral part of the team through their participation. There is both individual and collective learning, which lead to development and growth. This promotes decisions that are arrived at through relationships and cooperation. Examples of participative leaders include facilitators, group therapists and arbitrators.

2.3.7 Transformational Leadership Theory

The Transformational leadership theory is about how a leader changes and transforms other individuals⁷¹. It is a theory about how to get people to want to change, improve and to be led. It involves assessing associates' motives, satisfying their needs and valuing them. This change and transformation takes place through four ways, namely, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration as shown below.

⁷¹ Northouse, P.G. 2001. *Leadership Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

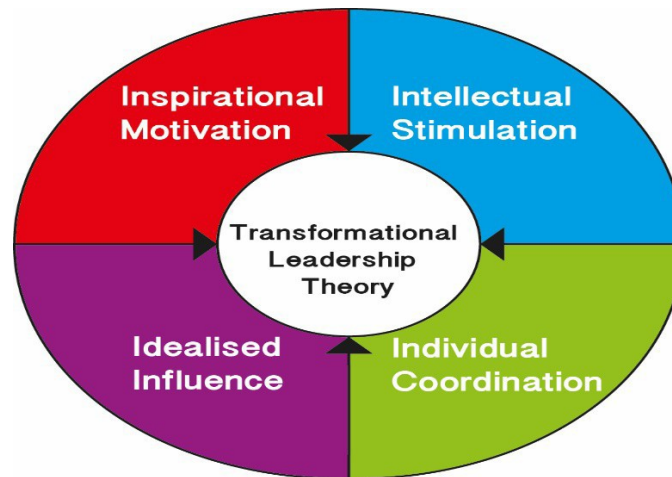


Figure 2.1: Four Ways of Transformational Leadership

Idealised influence takes place when leaders act as role models to their followers. The followers tend to respect and trust them. Through this relationship of respect and trust, the followers look up to their leaders as role models. They tend to aspire to be like them through emulation. The theory argues that when followers aspire to be like their leaders, they automatically begin to transform in the way they see and do things.

Inspirational motivation is about leaders inspiring their followers to commit to the vision and mission of the organization. When followers are motivated to be committed to the vision and mission of the organization, they tend to want to achieve goals that are set for the realization of the vision and mission. This improves the culture of work as followers get inspired to optimize organizational performance. Intellectual stimulation is about leaders who encourage their followers to be innovative and creative. Leaders do this by instilling a culture of critical thinking and problem solving among the workforce. Individuals and group beliefs are challenged as they have to think out of the box and be solution-finders to prevailing challenges. The theory argues that as individuals think critically, they become innovative and creative. As they become innovative and creative, they get transformed as they transform the organization.

Individual consideration takes place when leaders pay attention to followers as individuals. Leaders assume a role of being coaches and mentors to individual followers. The theory assumes that when followers are considered as individuals, the individual attention transforms them. The transformation of individuals leads to improved individual performance. This ultimately results in maximum organizational output.

As with any theory, the transformational leadership theory has its own inherent weaknesses.

For example, it is too broad and very close to the tenet of the trait leadership theory. It seems to espouse an assumption that leadership is a learned behaviour. There is an element of power domination that is encouraged through inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence and individual consideration. Finally, decisions through this theory can be delayed if there is no consensus.

2.3.8 Power and Influence Theory

The power and influence theory examines the source of power for leaders. It argues that leaders use their power and influence to get optimal output from followers. The theory identifies three types of *modus operandi* of leaders to use power to influence their followers. They are legitimate, reward and coercive powers. Legitimate power refers to power associated with the position an individual occupies. This is legitimate power in the sense that an individual exercises such powers as mandated by the employers. It is the type of power that is linked to the functions the individual performs. Such powers could include appointments and dismissals of employees and budget approval.

The legitimate power and influence are not different from the coercive powers and both carry the same elements. Coercive power is influence imposed upon followers in whatever manner. It adopts a top-down approach to issues of leadership rather than a bottom-up and/ or top-bottom-up type of leadership. This approach may stem from the position one occupies but sometimes is a product of a dictatorial leadership style.

The theory argues that the source of legitimate, reward and coercive power may also be expertise and referent. Referent refers to the personal appeal and charm of leaders. Referent can be associated with charismatic leadership where one's way of appealing to the ears of listeners plays a critical role in winning the minds of people. Some people refer to this leadership type as heroic leadership. Appearance and language proficiency have more bearing than the quality of content delivered to people.

The theory further argues that the power of a leader resides on the expert knowledge possessed by the individual. When an individual demonstrates expertise on the job, expert knowledge translates into power and influence over others. The followers promote an individual to leadership in respect of the expert knowledge the individual has in a particular field. Expertise distinguishes an individual and makes one to be outstanding from the rest and, therefore, an automatic leader of choice.

Reward is another source of power to influence followers. The argument here is that

followership is not arbitrary but rather a reward to a leader. In other words, the theory argues that followers are not blind when following a leader. Followership becomes a reward to a leader for the role played to followers. The reward is a form of recognition for the above-average performance of a leader.

In a nutshell, leadership theories discussed above can be summarized as follows:

Trait Theory: Focuses on unique traits of individuals that they are born with such as height, weight, intelligence and personality. In terms of this theory, it is these traits that distinguish leadership capabilities.

Behavioural Theory: Attributes leadership to a specific way of behaving that makes one either an effective or ineffective leader.

Situational/ Contingency Theory: Attributes leadership to situations that determine leadership type.

The Great-Man Theory: Assumes that the leadership capacity is inherent.

Participative Theory: Assumes that effective leadership only considers group involvement in decision-making.

Transactional Theory: Focuses on the role of supervision and organizational system of rewards and punishment.

Transformational Theory: Focuses on the connections formed between the leader and followers.

Power and Influence Theory: Focuses on the power and influence individuals have on others.

2.4 Conclusion

How leadership has evolved over the past centuries to date, the way it is defined and various theories and models that have been formulated all point to the following:

- a) Leadership, as a concept, is currently foregrounded on certain behaviours of individuals. It is defined according to what a person does at a given point in time. All existing theories of leadership are an attempt to cover all behavioural aspects of individuals in different situations. This means that there is still no end to the evolution of leadership theories; and
- b) The existing leadership theories only confine leadership to people in positions of power. It is about the positions they occupy, what they do and how they inspire followers to take instructions. That is why organisations have hierarchical leadership structures with clearly

defined and separate functions and responsibilities. This has subsequently embedded bureaucracy in organizational structures. The fundamental gap remains with both the individuals in leadership positions and followers during crisis situations. A crisis situation calls for an immediate response without necessary following protocols. Moreover, during a crisis situation, everyone becomes a leader in his or her own right because a quick solution has to be found. This gap needs to be closed because this forms part of leadership responsibility;

- c) Furthermore, existing leadership theories completely exclude the environmental context of leadership, which is the organization. They do not show the influence and the fluid nature of the organization where leadership is exercised. Organisational environments remain complex, dynamic and unpredictable sometimes. Therefore, given this organizational nature, there is no single leadership theory that can be applicable for all situations in an organization. A theory that combines more than one theory is needed for the gap to be filled; and
- d) Theories examined in this chapter do not consider the role of intellectual capacity or individual intelligence in the whole leadership practice. Rules have a part they play in an individual's behaviour. Training also plays a part, but certain individual actions can be traced from an individual intellectual capacity. An individual acts the way he or she does because this is how the situation makes sense to him or her. This is what is lacking in the existing theories of leadership.

However, the varying leadership perspectives in terms of definitions, theories and models do not belittle the significance of leadership. The need for effective leadership is still the main concern in the 21st century, and even though it has uncertainties and discontinuities, it also has enticing opportunities. Business grapples with direction and focus for competitive positions in markets that are transformed by rampant technology, globalization and the recent economic awakening in countries such as China and India. Globalisation, with its complex dynamic proponents, adversaries, heretics and converts is the macro context that business leaders have to factor into their pursuit of relevance as leadership imperatives. Therefore, the importance of leadership for an organizational par performance cannot be underrated. However, the greatest challenge remains with unpacking the leadership concept in a manner that befits individual intelligence, environmental and organizational complexities. The existing literature on leadership does not address this challenge. Instead, current literature suffers from lack of

precision, comprehensiveness and theoretical integration⁷².

This makes it compelling to re-frame leadership differently without replacing it as a topic. This is not only based on the gaps in the existing theories which entrench the static nature of leadership but most importantly, on the nature and character of organisations as systems that require a leadership typology that is foregrounded on a relevant theory. Therefore, uncovering organisations as systems is necessary first to underscore their dynamism in order to give context to how leadership should be re-framed before examining the relevant theory that should underpin the leadership discourse for optimal organizational performance.

The following chapter examines organisations as systems. Therefore, any relevant leadership theory should embrace the unique nature of organisations as systems. Such a recognition will make the theory relevant and improves organizational leadership.

⁷² Avolio, B.J. 2007. Promoting more integrative strategies for leadership theory-building, *American Psychologist*, 62, pp. 25-33.

Chapter 3

Organisations as Systems

31 Introduction

Leadership, as a purpose driven and goal-centered response action by an individual or group of people to different situations, never occurs in a vacuum and out of context. There is always a context that foregrounds an individual's or group's response in any given situation. Leadership takes place in a defined context and environment generally called an organization. This organizational context, which can be formal and informal, invariably constitutes a framework that sets limits and contexts to decision making. As the study focuses on organizational leadership, it makes it necessary to examine the nature of organisations as they provide leadership context.

The organizational context is not necessarily static but is rather in a constant state of movement, creation and growth⁷³. As the organization is in a state of flux, it evolves through learning⁷⁴, adaptation and knowledge creation⁷⁵. This makes an organization a system that is complex and evolves and does not always thrive on the basis of principles of certainties and predictabilities. Therefore, leadership in an organization cannot be devoid of this reality of an organization being a system that learns through adaptation, evolution and knowledge creation. Understanding the nature of the organization is justifiable if one is to have an acceptable

⁷³ Wren, D.A.; Bedeian, A.G., 2009. *The Evolution of Management Thought* (6th ed.), USA: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

⁷⁴ Senge, P.M., 1990. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of Organisational Learning*. London: Random.

⁷⁵ Boisot, M. and MacMillan, I.C. 2007. "Crossing epistemological boundaries: managerial and entrepreneurial approaches to knowledge management", In: Boisot, M.H., Macmillan, I.C and Han, K.S. (eds.), *Explorations in Information Space: Knowledge, Agents and Organisation*, Oxford University Press, pp. 48-76.

perspective of leadership enigma. The dynamic nature of the organization, together with its environment, informs and is informed by complex leadership typology that is based on a relevant theoretical framework.

The complexity of leadership typology is based on the fact that any purposeful response or action cannot be attributed only to an individual or group causation. It stems from a number of identifiable and unknown factors both from within an individual or group and the organization itself. Even the individual or group action remains complex in terms of interpretation and meaning. That is why the existing leadership theories, as discussed in Chapter 2, remain limited in the manner they have been postulated. They are static and therefore fail to embrace the complexity of leadership beyond one thing and not the other. An analysis of the nature of an organization as a system is critical in understanding effective leadership.

32 Organisations as Learning Systems

Organisations and individuals exist in an environment that is characterized by a continuous and rapidly increasing change which requires a great need for learning. This means organisations actively create, capture, transfer and mobilise knowledge in order to adapt to a changing environment through interactions that take place among the individuals. The notion of organizational learning was popularized by Peter Senge who defined it as a process where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations of thinking are set free and finally, where people are continually learning to see the whole together⁷⁶.

According to Pedler et al.⁷⁷ a learning organization is one that facilitates learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself. This type of learning does not take place simply by training individuals but through a total and collective participation of individuals at all levels towards shared values or principles⁷⁸. Hawkins⁷⁹ argues that learning in an organization takes place in a network of interconnection which is related to its ethical, aesthetic and ecological environment. According to this interpretation, organizational learning involves complex

⁷⁶ Senge, P.M. 1990:3

⁷⁷ Pedler, M; Burgoyne, J. and Boydell, T. 1991. *The Learning Company: Strategy for Sustainable Development*, London: Mc Graw-hill.

⁷⁸ Watkins, K. and Marsick, V. 1992. 'Building the Learning Organisation: A New role for Human Resource Developers', *Studies in continuing Education*, Vol. 14, No.2, pp.115-129.

⁷⁹ Hawkins, P., 1994. "Taking stock and facing the challenge", *Management Learning*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 71-82.

interactions between two or more individuals and continuous interactions between and among coalitions, teams, collectives⁸⁰ or groups⁸¹.

However, notwithstanding the above definitions of organizational learning, it remains difficult to define it. Stewart⁸² puts it bluntly that:

We can't take you out to visit a learning company... But the keyword is transformation – a radical change in the form and character of what is already there (p.77).

Underpinning the philosophy of organizations as learning systems was a paradigm shift towards a notion of organisations as interconnected systems. The philosophy of organizational learning was developed from a body of work called *systems thinking*. Systems thinking is a conceptual framework, a body of knowledge and tools that has been developed over the past 50 years. Historically, systems thinking originated from the field of systems dynamics which is an offshoot of systems engineering. In general, a system refers to anything that shapes or conditions the behaviour. Central to systems thinking is that both business and human behaviour or efforts are systems. They are bound by invisible fabrics of interrelated actions.

The significance of the systems organisational perspective is that it helps to provide an approach of managing complexity. It is a tool to help decision-makers understand the cause and effect relationships between data, information and people. It expands individual and collective thinking skills and improves individual and collective decision making by focusing attention on the causes of performance problems and the systems that change will produce improved results. This is done by inculcating a way of thinking to leaders and individuals about the forces that shape the behaviour of systems and organisations. It also encourages a way of looking at the whole and shifting the focus and attention away from the pieces and fragments. It instills a sense of looking for inter-relationships that shape the kind of behaviour and outcomes that are generated in an organization. This is done through some form of enquiry based on the following questions:

- ☐ What happened and what has been happening?
- ☐ Why has this been happening?
- ☐ How can the problem be resolved?

⁸⁰ Dixon, N. 1994. *The Organisational Learning Cycle-How we can Learn Collectively*. McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead.

⁸¹ Franklin, P. 1996. "Dialogues in Strategy". *Journal of Strategic Change*, Vol. 4, p. 229.

⁸² Stewart, J. 1996. *Managing Change through Training and Development*, 2nd ed., London: Kogan Page.

This makes the systems more significant when situations are problematic and resistant to change. It comes in handy as a planning resource by illuminating the possible choices embedded in complex, divergent problems and gives light on possible outcomes. In the process of learning, there is knowledge creation as discussed below.

33 Organisations as Knowledge Creation Systems

Knowledge is pivotal as a meaning construct. The meaning construct is the bedrock of decision making. Employees in an organization do not only acquire knowledge from an organization, but they also bring knowledge to the organization. They bring their expertise to develop products and services. It was on the basis of the expertise that workers bring to an organization that in 1960s Peter Drucker⁸³ developed a concept that refers to them as ‘knowledge workers’. Hawryszkiewicz⁸⁴ argues that given this reality of employees as ‘knowledge workers’, their work environment should be kept flexible. This will help them to come up with ideas, evaluate and put them into practice. If employees are experts in their own right through the knowledge they possess, it means the influence and power of the knowledge they possess cannot be underestimated in their decision making. Most of their decisions can be attributed to their expertise through the knowledge they possess. That is why Peter Drucker⁸⁵ opined that ‘knowledge workers’ are not subordinates but associates.

Boisot and MacMillan⁸⁶ argue that knowledge comprises a set of beliefs which inform decisions by agents to take actions. They use Plato’s definition of knowledge as justified true belief. The definition contains three conditions, namely, a true condition, a justification condition and a belief condition. This means knowledge inculcates a belief that is so true that it precipitates a particular action which can be justified. In other words, it becomes this knowledge that can be used to explain a course of action taken by an individual. Decisions taken stem from the justified belief people have consequent to the knowledge they possess.

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi,⁸⁷ there are two distinguished types of knowledge that

⁸³ Drucker, P. 1994. *Post Capitalist Society*. Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford.

⁸⁴ Hawryszkiewicz, I.T. 2010. *Knowledge Management*, London: Pelgrave MacMillan.

⁸⁵ Drucker, P. 2001. *The Essential Drucker*. Harper

⁸⁶ Boisot, M. and MacMillan, I.C. 2007, “Crossing epistemological boundaries: managerial and entrepreneurial approaches to knowledge management”, In: Boisot, M.H., MacMillan, I.C. and K.S. Han (eds); *Exploration in Information Space: Knowledge, Agents and Organisation*, Oxford University Press, pp. 48-76.

⁸⁷ Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H., 1995. *The Knowledge Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*, New York: Oxford University Press.

workers have, namely, explicit and tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge includes cognitive and technical elements. Cognitive elements operate through mental models that are working worldviews and develop through the creation and manipulation of mental analogies. Mental models like schemata, paradigms, perspectives, beliefs and viewpoints help individuals perceive and define their world. The technical element of tacit knowledge includes concrete know-how, crafts and skills. However, explicit knowledge is about past events or objects and is created sequentially by digital activity that is theory progressive.

Nonaka and Takeuchi⁸⁸ developed the two knowledge types into what became known as the SECI model of knowledge creation as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

From/ To	Tacit	Explicit
Tacit	<p><i>Socialisation</i></p> <p>Creates tacit knowledge through shared experiences and the development of mental models and technical skills, language.</p>	<p><i>Externalisation</i></p> <p>Converts tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge through knowledge articulation using language. Dialogue or collective reflection is needed.</p>
Explicit	<p><i>Internalisation</i></p> <p>Converts explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge through learning by doing such things as manuals and verbal stories.</p>	<p><i>Combination</i></p> <p>Creates systemic knowledge through the sorting, adding, re-categorising and re-contextualising of explicit knowledge to create new explicit knowledge.</p>

Figure 3.1: The SECI Cycle of Knowledge Creation

Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995

According to the SECI model, knowledge creation takes place through a dynamic entangling of the different modes of knowledge conversion from tacit to explicit; explicit to tacit; explicit to explicit and tacit to tacit knowledge in a process that is spiral⁸⁹ above. This is a dynamic synthesizing process where the mix of tacit and explicit knowledge forms a

⁸⁸ Nonaka, I. and Takeuchi, H., 1995

⁸⁹ Nonaka, I., 1994, "A dynamic theory of organizational knowledge creation", *Organisation Science*, Vol. 5, No.1, pp. 14-37.

continuum manipulated through dialectical thinking⁹⁰. It is this dialectical interaction between participants that results in the emergence of new organisational knowledge.

The dynamic entangling of the different modes of knowledge conversion takes place through four processes, namely: socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation as shown in Figure 3.1 above. They all convert between tacit and / or explicit knowledge. In knowledge conversion, socialisation refers to a process by which synthesized knowledge is created through the sharing of experiences that people have as they develop shared mental models and technical skills. Since it is fundamentally experiential, it connects people through their tacit knowledge.

Then externalisation which follows occurs when tacit knowledge is made explicit. In conversion, the creation of conceptual knowledge occurs through knowledge articulation in a communication process that uses language in dialogue and with collective reflection. The use of expressions of communication is often inadequate, inconsistent and insufficient. They leave gaps between images and expression while promoting reflection and interaction. It, therefore, triggers dialogue.

During combination, explicit knowledge is converted through its integration by adding, combining and categorising knowledge through what is sometimes referred to as a systemising process. Finally, in the next process, explicit knowledge is made tacit by its internalisation. This is a learning which occurs through the behavioural development of operational knowledge. It uses explicit knowledge like manuals or verbal stories where it is appropriate.

In summary, knowledge and expertise are dispersed throughout organisations and often held by individuals and units. This makes organisations to be knowledge-based entities. It is this knowledge that creates an individual worldview which interacts with the worldviews of others directly and indirectly through some form of constructions. An individual worldview, through mental models, constitutes some form of reality which changes as worldviews change⁹¹. The worldview creates a frame of reference within which an individual acts in a particular manner. Individuals use the framework to act in a particular manner to find solutions to challenges. This shows the influence of knowledge creation in the decision making processes within organisations. Therefore, leadership should also be looked at within the context of knowledge

⁹⁰ Nonaka, I., Toyama, R. and Hirata, T., 2008. *Managing Flow: A Process Theory of the Knowledge Based Firm*, Pelgrave MacMillan.

⁹¹ Yolles, M.I., 1999. *Management Systems: A Viable Approach*, Financial Times, London: Pitman.

and expertise that individuals have to justify their worldview and true belief to certain actions.

34 Organisations as integral parts of Sensemaking Systems

In the discussions above, an emphasis has been put on leadership as nothing else more than a purposeful action by the actor with a view to achieve certain outcomes. What prompts this purposeful behaviour may vary from situations that are normal and those that are abnormal. However, what is common is that such an action by the actor is predicated and foregrounded on the sense the actor makes of the situation. Here, it is argued that an organisation does not only provide the platform or space for sensemaking but further provides contextual mechanisms and substance for sensemaking.

In this sense, an organisation is perceived as an accounting practice by which people attempt to make sense of their world⁹². It is this organisational ability to provide context and substance for sensemaking that makes it an inevitable part of sensemaking. In other words, the perspective and meaning that an individual makes of the situation which informs a particular action is partly due to the mechanisms and substance provided for by the organisation. This makes an organisation an integral part of the sensemaking systems as discussed below.

3.4.1 The organisational Context for Sensemaking

Taylor and Van Every⁹³ argue that making sense through the interpretation of a phenomenon does not take place in a vacuum. It is always context bound⁹⁴. In this argument, there is juxtaposition of sensemaking with organisational context to explain the cognition of individual actors. According to Weber and Glynn,⁹⁵ this context of institutional cultural-cognition is implicitly implied in Karl Weick's depiction of sensemaking. According to Karl Weick,⁹⁶ sensemaking is triggered by action formation mechanisms that take place at the micro-level of inter-subjective processes while the organisational context provides sensemaking at the macro-

⁹² Burrell, G., and Morgan, G., 1979. *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, London: Heinemann.

⁹³ Taylor, J.R. and Van Every, E.J. 2000. *The Emergent Organisation: Communication as its Site and Surface*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaums.

⁹⁴ Taylor and Van Every opine that "What is missing in Weick's 1995 Sensemaking in Organisations version of enactment is an understanding of the organisation as a communicational construction or an awareness of the institutionalising of human society that accompanies organisation with its many internal contradictions and tensions" (Taylor and Van Every, 2000,p 275).

⁹⁵ Weber, K. and Glynn, M.A. 'Making Sense with Institutions: Context, Thought and Action in Karl Weick's Theory'. In: *Organisation Studies*, 2006, No.27, Vol.11, pp.1639-1660.

⁹⁶ Weick, k., 1995

level of extra-subjective structures within an organisation⁹⁷.

According to Wiley,⁹⁸ the extra-subjective structure is one of the three levels of sensemaking. Others include inter-subjective and generic subjective levels of sensemaking. The extra-subjective structure is a level of symbolic reality where meanings are arrived at without necessarily knowing the subject. A typical example would be culture which enables people to have a particular perspective and meaning on certain things without necessarily being taught subjects about such things. This is the case because culture is not taught but understood through socialisation and other forms of interaction.

The contextual mechanisms that organisations provide is how and what sense can be made of a given situation (internalised cognitive constraint)⁹⁹. Organisations contextualise sensemaking through institutionalised roles and templates which undergird individual actions as they discharge their duties. Sensemaking enters as shared cognitive structures that are imbued with value. The cognitive structures are often taken for granted and hence their role is underestimated and not fully recognised. According to Zucker,¹⁰⁰ individuals internalise these structures through socialisation processes in their current context or through retaining structures internalised during early socialisation into roles within larger fields. Such roles become embodied in actors as habitus or tastes and dispositions encoded into action scripts that are enacted¹⁰¹ or habitually repeated without much mediating process¹⁰².

This means that organisations function as minimal abstract sensemaking structures that shape a particular perspective on certain realities through shared conceptions. The conceptions in the long run constitute the nature of social reality and the frames through which meaning is made¹⁰³. In this sense, organisations serve as feedstock for sensemaking¹⁰⁴.

⁹⁷ Wiley, N., 1988, 'The Micro-macro problem in social theory', *Sociological Theory* 6; pp.254-261.

⁹⁸ Wiley, N., 1988

⁹⁹ Barley, S.R. and Tolbert, P.S., 'Institutionalisation and Structuration: Studying the links between action and institution', *Organisation Studies* 18, 1997, pp. 93-117.

¹⁰⁰ Zucker, L.G., 1991. 'The Role of Institutionalisation in Cultural Persistence'. In: *The New Institutionalism in Organisational Analysis*. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio (eds), pp.83-107, Chicago, IL, university of Chicago Press.

¹⁰¹ Barley, S.R. and Tolbert, P.S., 1997.

¹⁰² Zucker, L.G., 1991.

¹⁰³ Scott, W.R., 2003. 'Institutional Carriers: Reviewing modes of transporting ideas over time and space and considering their consequences'. *Industrial and Corporate Change* 12, pp.879-894.

¹⁰⁴ Weber, K. and Glynn, M.A., 'Making Sense with Institutions: Context, Thought and Action in Karl Weick's Theory. In: *Organisation Studies* 27(11): pp.1639-1660.

3.4.2 The organisational Substance for Sensemaking

Organisations are part of sensemaking because they shape the process through which meaning is arrived at. They shape the process through the organisational context which provides substance for sensemaking. The substance with which sense is made is defined by Weick¹⁰⁵ as minimal sensible structures. Minimal sensible structures are abstractions and typifications that are linked to perceptual cues. In other words, individuals do not only learn from organisations but also draw cues to construct meaning by interpreting objects. The frames constitute substance for sensemaking, and every organisation has frames.

Individuals in organisations rely on existing frames from both within and outside to identify cues, extract and make sense out of them. The frames enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences in their world¹⁰⁶. They serve like strategic generalities and total picture from which to draw the specifics to make sense of the object or phenomena for decision making¹⁰⁷. The specifics become those cues from generalities.

According to Weick,¹⁰⁸ the frames and cues are more like abstract vocabularies. A cue exists in a frame, and it is a cue in a frame that makes sense and not the cue or frame alone. Sensemaking takes place when there is a connection between a frame and a cue and the meaning is relational. This means the content of sensemaking is embodied in frames.

Weick¹⁰⁹ has argued that there are six organisational frames from which cues are identified to interpret objects. He refers to these frames as common vocabularies from which the society makes sense of things or interprets objects. They are ideology, third-order controls, paradigms, theories of action, tradition and stories.

Beyer¹¹⁰ and Trice and Beyer¹¹¹ define ideology as a shared relatively coherently interrelated set of emotionally charged beliefs, values and norms that bind some people together and help them to make sense of their worlds. It is the ideologies that provide substance for sensemaking through cause-effect relations, preferences for certain outcomes and expectations of

¹⁰⁵ Weick, K., 1995

¹⁰⁶ Snow, et al, 1986.

¹⁰⁷ Westley, F.R., 1990.

¹⁰⁸ Weick, K., 1995.

¹⁰⁹ Weick, K., 1995.

¹¹⁰ Beyer, J.M., 1981. Ideologies, Values, and Decision Making in Organisations. In: P.C. Nystrom & W.H. Starbuck (eds), *Handbook of Organisational Design*, Vol. 2, pp. 166-202, New York: Oxford University Press.

¹¹¹ Trice, H.M., and Beyer, J.M., 1993. *The Cultures of Work Organisations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

appropriate behaviours. People select what they think matters from this vast of ideological substance to arrive at a particular meaning. Ideologies help to structure the simplification of situations in order to make sense for decision making.

In terms of third-order controls which consist of assumptions and definitions, they serve as premises for decision making, especially at the senior management level in organisations where work is non-routine. They influence the premises people use when interrogating situations for decisions. Paradigms, on the other hand, are a third embodiment of content of sensemaking which is in frames. They refer to sets of implicit assumptions about how things hold together and make sense in the world.

The other organisational frames that help provide substance for sensemaking are what Weick refers to as stories of action. Stories of action tend to differ from other frames in that they are the only frames that build on stimulus-response (S-R) paradigm. They are based on the accumulated and aggregated tried and tested knowledge that people have over a period of time from different situations. When similar situations present themselves, people tend to rely on the previous approaches to respond to such situations. Situations serve as stimuli that elicit certain actions (responses). Over a period of time, those actions become a theoretical base in the form of rules and routines for certain organisational actions. When new situations present themselves such theories of action are just refined and implemented.

The theories of action do not differ much from traditions, that is, a vocabulary of predecessors. According to Shils,¹¹² traditions provide content for sensemaking. Traditions refer to something that was created, performed or believed in the past and has been transmitted from generation to generation. People interpret objects on the basis of how others have interpreted the past. The other vocabulary that provides substance of sensemaking is story telling. Stories are powerful stand-alone contents for sensemaking. They allow clarity achieved in one situation to be extended and imposed into the other area. Weick has identified seven ways in which stories provide substance for sensemaking as follows:

- They integrate what is known about a situation or event with that which is conjectural;
- They suggest a causal order for events that originally have not been related;
- Stories help people to talk about absent things and link them with the present in order to have a better meaning for better action;

¹¹² Shils, E. 1981. *Tradition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Stories help people to reconstruct earlier complex events;
- They guide action even before routines are formulated and further enrich them after formulation;
- Stories enable people to build a database of experience from which to infer how things work and finally;
- Stories transmit and reinforce third-order controls by conveying shared values and meaning.

Based on the above, it is apparent that stories do provide tools for diagnosis of objects.

What needs to be understood from the above is that the content of vocabularies of sensemaking is interspersed throughout the organisation and helps to provide meaning through interpretation of objects. There is no single situation where meaning can be arrived at through a single vocabulary of sensemaking. It will always be arrived at through a combination of more than one vocabulary of sensemaking. This is the case because the world is complex and evolving and therefore requires a multi-dimensional approach to interpret objects for action.

In summary, organisations serve as the building blocks or substance of sensemaking. According to Weber and Glynn,¹¹³ first, organisations provide context for sensemaking through prime, edit and trigger¹¹⁴. Second, organisations dynamically guide and edit action formation for sensemaking activities through the supply of contextual influence. Third, organisations are continually enacted and accomplished in on-going sensemaking processes.

Given the discussion on leadership and leadership theories in Chapter 2, followed by the discussions on the dynamic nature of organisations and how they influence meaning-making, the following chapter looks at sensemaking as propounded by Karl Weick as the most relevant and complementary theoretical framework for organisational leadership discourse. Sensemaking will be defined, and its properties identified and examined. Central to the definitions and the discussion of the properties of sensemaking is how individuals make meaning and act on situations.

¹¹³ Weber, K., Glynn, M.A, 2006

¹¹⁴ Organisations prime sensemaking by providing social cues that lead to greater role in action formation, edit sensemaking through social feedback processes and trigger sensemaking through endogenous organisational contradiction and ambivalence.

Chapter 4

Sensemaking and Sensemaking Theory

4.1 Introduction

Sensemaking theory has its roots traced back to the beginning of the 20th century¹¹⁵ even though it began to emerge as a distinct topic of study in the late 1960s¹¹⁶ in various disciplines such as human-computer interaction, information sciences and organisational studies. However, it should be noted that even though there is considerable literature on sensemaking, as a concept, there is variation and sometimes synonymous reference to it as a theory, framework or perspective. Generally, in organisational studies, the concept of sensemaking has initially been used to focus largely on cognitive activities of framing experienced situations as meaningful. It has been perceived as a collaborative process of creating shared awareness and understanding out of different individuals' perspectives and varied interests. As discussed in Chapter 1, this theses is foregrounded on sensemaking theory as a framework that examines human cognition as determinants for human actions and processes.

Karl Weick became one of the prominent researchers of sensemaking in organisational studies, providing insight into factors that surface as organisations address either uncertain or

¹¹⁵ Dewey, J. 1922. *Human Nature and Conduct*. Mineola, NY: Dover.

¹¹⁶ Weick, K.E. 1969. *The Social Psychology of Organising*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

ambiguous situations^{117, 118, 119, 120}. Generally, the underlying assumptions of sensemaking even in Weick's perspective are that:

- The world is complex and ambiguous;
- The available information is massive and contradictory;
- Individuals have a limited ability to process all the information;
- Individuals are uncomfortable with unresolved ambiguity or contradictory information (cognitive dissonance); and
- Most actions, beliefs and cognitions are socially influenced.

In this chapter, an attempt is made to demonstrate that sensemaking is grounded in deductions from well-articulated theories and inductions from specific cases of struggle to reduce ambiguity. Such theories and specific cases are identified and examined below. It is further argued that sensemaking induces a mind-set to focus on process that is dynamic than an event which is static. It is rather more about the discovery of the underpinnings of a phenomenon than the invention of new things. It is explained below that sensemaking helps people to read into things the meaning they wish to see, vest objects, utterances, actions with subjective meaning, which helps make their world intelligible to themselves¹²¹. The sensemaking theory is examined at organisational, group and individual levels. The groups and individuals are viewed as actors and the organisation as both a context provider and the environment for individual actions.

4.2 Sensemaking Theory and its Meaning

Karl Weick¹²² is a proponent of sensemaking theory as a perspective or framework that can help in the understanding of intricacies that take place in organisations, groups and individuals. He has artfully constructed sensemaking theoretical framework in his published book titled

¹¹⁷ Weick, K., 1988. Enacted Sensemaking in Crisis Situations. *Journal of Management Studies*, vol. 25, pp. 305-317.

¹¹⁸ Weick, K., 1993. The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organisations: The Mann Gulch Disaster, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 3, pp. 628-652.

¹¹⁹ Weick, K., 1995.

¹²⁰ Weick, K., Sutcliffe, K.M. and Obstfeld, D. 2005.

¹²¹ Frost, P.J. and Morgan, G., 1983. Symbols and sensemaking: The realisation of a framework. In: L.R. Pondy, P.J. Frost, G. Morgan and T.C. Dandridge (eds), *Organisational Symbolism*, pp. 207-236. Greenwich, CT: JAI.

¹²² Weick, K. E. 1995

‘Sensemaking in Organisations’. In this book, he has carefully expanded on the dominant existing organisational theories and research beyond decision making and bounded strategic rationality. Such theories include ethnomethodology and cognitive dissonance theories¹²³. The cognitive dissonance theory focuses on post-decisional efforts to revise the meaning of decisions that have negative consequences.

Both the cognitive dissonance and sensemaking theories are foregrounded on six strands, namely:

- *Sensemaking by justification*: How can I know what I think till I see what I say¹²⁴?
- *Choice*: I choose which words to focus on and which thoughts will explain them;
- *Retrospect*: I look back at what I said earlier from a later point in time when the talking has stopped;
- *Discrepancy as the occasion for sensemaking*: I feel a need to see what I say when something doesn’t make sense;
- *Social construction*: I invoke the thoughts I have been socialised to label as acceptable; and
- *Action*: My act of speaking starts the sensemaking process.

In sensemaking theory, Karl Weick argues that organisations are inherently complex and ambiguous, together with their environments. Therefore, the creation of reality through decision making and strategic rationality should be an on-going process that is anchored on the retrospective sense people make of the situations they face. The retrospective sense of situations shapes organisational structure and behaviour. It enables people to interpret the present in a way that is meaning-making to them. He refers to this meaning-making as a sense that underpins organisational structure and behaviour of individuals. Situations serve as stimuli for retrospective sense, and this takes place on an on-going basis. This is elaborated more on properties of sensemaking below.

In arriving at the philosophy underpinning sensemaking and the interpretation for meaning-making, there were mainly two cases that Karl Weick used, namely: the Battered-Child Syndrome (BCS) and the Westrum Fallacy of Centrality¹²⁵. The BCS consists of a pattern of injuries to young children such as head, arms, legs and ribs that were observed over a period

¹²³ Festinger, L. 1957. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

¹²⁴ Weick, K. E, 1979. *The Social Psychology of Organising*, 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill, p. 133.

¹²⁵ Westrum, R., 1982. Social intelligence about Hidden Events. *Knowledge*, 3 (3), pp. 381-400.

of time. Medical doctors could not diagnose the cause due to inadequate medical history that was provided by parents. In actual fact, it later transpired that the pattern of injuries was as a result of parental assaults to their children, and parents never reported this and instead attributed the injuries to accidents¹²⁶. The injuries could only be seen in part in X-rays and consequently led to delays in having the syndrome reported by the medical community and eventually outlawed.

What made the BCS an instance of sensemaking is that first, someone notices something in an on-going flow of events: in the form of a surprise, a discrepant set of cues or even something that does not fit a Battered Child. For instance, in the period between 1967 and 1976, the following cases were recorded for BCS, namely: 1967 (7000); 1972 (60 000) and 1976 (500 000)^{127, 128}. Throughout all these years, experts overestimated the likelihood that they would surely know the phenomenon if it was actually taking place or not. Experts at all times were overwhelmed by the belief that as long as they do not know, surely it is not there. Westrum refers to this as ‘the fallacy of centrality’. According to the fallacy of centrality, if ‘I don’t know about the event, surely, it is not happening’.¹²⁹

The second reason behind the philosophy of BCS as an instance of sensemaking is that it involves identity, retrospect, enactment, social contact, on-going events, cues and plausibility as follows:

- Someone notices something (*identity construction*) in an on-going flow of events (*on-going process*) in the form of a surprise (stimuli) a discrepant set of cues, and something does not fit cues. The discrepant cues are spotted when someone looks back over elapsed experience (*retrospection*);
- Plausible speculations such as parents failing to realise the severity of injuries are offered to explain the cues and their relative rarity;
- The person making the speculations publishes them in a tangible journal article that becomes part of the environment of the medical community for others. He or she

¹²⁶ Westrum, R. 1982, p.386.

¹²⁷ Weick, K., 1995, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Westrum, R., 1982, p. 392.

¹²⁹ Researcher Ron Westrum, observing the diagnostic practices of paediatricians in the 1940s and 1950s spotted what he had to call the fallacy of centrality. The fallacy is this: Under the assumption that you are in a central position, you presume that if something serious were happening, you would know about it. And that you don’t know about it, it isn’t happening. It is precisely this distortion that kept paediatricians from diagnosing child abuse until the early 1960s.

creates an object that was not ‘out there’ to begin with but is there for noticing (*enactment*); and

- Speculations do not generate widespread attention right away because as Westrum noted, the observations originated with radiologists who have infrequent social contact (*social activity*) with paediatricians and families of children. Such contacts are crucial in the construction and perception of problems. This all became the characteristics of sensemaking as further explored below.

What made Weick¹³⁰ to relate the BCS events to an organisational environment is that the setting in which the BCS was discovered is organisational in more than one way. Paediatricians and radiologists who work through interlocking routines tied together in relatively formal nets of action perform specialised tasks intended to preserve the health of children. Medical personnel have shared understandings of their roles, expertise and stature, but they also act as shifting coalitions of interest groups. The prevalence of routines, generic understandings and roles enable the personnel to be interchanged. All of this facilitates coordinated action and imposes an invisible hands-on sensemaking process.

The limited reporting of the BCS such as the 7000 cases in 1967 relates to what Westrum calls ‘ambiguity’ in the short run which, when it does not intensify, leads to uncorrected observations and experience. However, when others begin to report similar experiences, anomalies become shared and sensibleness grows stronger¹³¹. In organisations, meaning-making intensifies when ambiguity diminishes through shared experiences. The other important aspect that relates to organisations in BCS is what Weick later referred to as the vocabularies of sensemaking¹³². Immediately words such as battered child were used, they evoked a sense of the extent of the ill-treatment of children and the urgency for intervention. That is why in organisations, vocabularies such as uncertainties, bargaining, performance appraisals, strategic planning normally evoke certain meanings and behaviours in different fora.

Based on the BCS and Westrum fallacy of centrality, Weick drew from literature different definitions of sensemaking which he contextualised to an organisational setting. It is these definitions which he used to expand on the properties of sensemaking. In fact, the properties of sensemaking became a summary of lessons drawn from literature with specific reference to

¹³⁰ Weick, K., 1995, p.3

¹³¹ Weick, K E 1995, p.3

¹³² Weick, K.E, 1995, pp. 106-132

the BCS and Westrum fallacy of centrality.

According to Huber and Daft,¹³³ sensemaking literally refers to the making of sense and the structuring of the unknown¹³⁴. Other investigators of sensemaking such as Goleman¹³⁵ define sensemaking as an event where an agent places stimuli into some kind of framework or frame of reference. When people put stimuli into frameworks, it helps them to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and predict¹³⁶. A typical example for this could be an organisational policy which provides details to processes, rules, standards and procedures. Such do not only provide a frame of reference but further guides and governs individuals' operations within an organisation. Invariably, this, in the long run, becomes an organisational culture when people have internalised policy precepts.

Meryl Louise¹³⁷ views sensemaking as a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain surprises that are recurring cyclically over a period of time. She argues that the cycle begins as individuals form unconscious and conscious anticipations and assumptions which serve as predictions about future events. Individuals then begin to experience events that may be discrepant from predictions. Discrepant events or surprises trigger a need for explanation or post-diction and correspondingly for a process through which interpretations of discrepancies are developed. The meaning or interpretation is attributed and assigned to surprise as an output of the sensemaking process rather than arising concurrently with the perception or detection of differences¹³⁸.

According to Thomas, Clark and Gioia,¹³⁹ sensemaking refers to the reciprocal interaction of information seeking, meaning ascription and action (p.240). In this definition's context,

¹³³ Huber, G.P. and Daft, R.L., 1987. The Information Environments of Organisations. In: F.M. Jablin, L.L. Putman, K.H. Roberts and L.W. Porter (eds), *Handbook of Organisational Communication*, pp. 130-164, Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

¹³⁴ Waterman, R.H., Jr. 1990. *Adhocracy: The Power to Change*. Memphis, TN: Whittle Direct Books.

¹³⁵ Goleman, D., 1990. *Vital Lies, Simply Truths: The Psychology of Self-deception*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

¹³⁶ Starbuck, W.H. and Milliken, F.J., 1988.. Executives Perceptual Filters: What they notice and how they make sense. In: D.C. Hambrick (ed). *The Executive Effect: Concepts and Methods for Studying the Managers*, pp. 35-65, Greenwich, CT: JAI.

¹³⁷ Louise, M., 1980. Surprise and Sensemaking: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 25, pp. 226 -251.

¹³⁸ Louise, M., 1980, p.241.

¹³⁹ Thomas, J.B., Clark, S.M. and Gioia, D.A. 1993. Strategic sensemaking and organisational performance: Linkages among scanning, interpretation, action and outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 36, pp. 239 -270.

environmental scanning, interpretation and all associated responses are an integral part of sensemaking. Feldman¹⁴⁰ describes sensemaking as an interpretive process that is necessary for organisational members to understand and share their understandings. Their shared understandings are on features of organisations such as what it is about, what it does well and poorly, what problems it faces and how it should resolve them. Feldman's description of sensemaking implies that it does not necessarily result in action. It may result in an understanding that action should not be taken or that a better understanding of the event or situation is needed. It may simply result in members of the organisation having more and different information about the ambiguous issues¹⁴¹. To Gioia and Chittipeddi,¹⁴² sensemaking is more of a private and singular activity. It is a process in which individuals develop cognitive maps of their environment¹⁴³.

In summary, sensemaking, according to Starbuck and Milliken¹⁴⁴ and Louise,¹⁴⁵ is about the placement of stimuli into frameworks. According to Thomas et al.,¹⁴⁶ sensemaking focuses on the interpretation of a phenomenon for action. However, with Feldman,¹⁴⁷ it is more of an interpretive process without necessarily intending to act. However, Weick¹⁴⁸ argues that sensemaking is about the placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding and patterning. Of critical importance is the sharp contrast that Weick draws between sensemaking and interpretation. Other definitions and descriptions of sensemaking see interpretation as synonymous and/ or a component of sensemaking.

Weick's argument is that it is applicable in humanities and social sciences, and interpretation applies to what the existing text means. Nonetheless, sensemaking goes beyond the text

¹⁴⁰ Feldman, M.S., 1989. *Order without Design*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

¹⁴¹ Feldman, M.S., 1989, p.20.

¹⁴² Gioia, D.A. and Chittipeddi, K., 1999. Sensemaking and sense-giving in strategic change initiation. *Strategic Management Journal*, Vol. 12, pp. 433-448.

¹⁴³ Ring, P.S. and Rands, G.P., 1989. Sensemaking, understanding and committing: Emergent interpersonal transaction processes in the evolution of 3m's microgravity research programme. In: A.H. Van de Ven, H.L. Angle and M.S. Poole (eds), *Research on the Management of Innovation: The Minnesota Studies*, pp. 171- 192, New York: Ballinger.

¹⁴⁴ Starbuck, W.H. and Milliken, F.J., 1988.

¹⁴⁵ Louise, M., 1980.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas, J.B., Clark, S.M. and Gioia, D.A., 1993.

¹⁴⁷ Feldman, M.S., 1989.

¹⁴⁸ Weick, K., 1995.

interpretation to how the text is actually constructed and how it is read. From this argument, Weick¹⁴⁹ sees sensemaking as about authoring and reading of text i.e. an activity or a process. Similarly to Weick, Taylor and Van Every¹⁵⁰ define sensemaking as a way station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action. In that way station, circumstances are retrospectively constructed in an on-going process into situations that are comprehended explicitly in words that foreground one's actions. Based on his definition of sensemaking, Weick identified seven properties that characterise sensemaking within the context of an organisation, groups and individuals as discussed below.

4.3 The Properties of Sensemaking

In an attempt to systematically outline the sequence in sensemaking, Karl Weick¹⁵¹ proposed what later became known as seven properties and distinguishing characteristics of sensemaking. Of great importance is that each of the properties is integrally linked but separate for the purpose of exploration and explanation. For instance, people that are concerned with identity (*identity construction*) in the context of others (*social*) engage on-going (*on-going*) events from which they extract cues (*extracted cues*) and make plausible sense (*plausibility*) retrospectively (*retrospective*), all the while enacting (*enacting*) more or less order into those on-going events¹⁵². All seven properties (in italics) are crudely represented as a sequence in this example even though they do not necessarily happen in that order in organisations, groups and individuals. The seven properties are discussed briefly below.

4.3.1 Sense is grounded in Identity Construction

Identity construction in sensemaking is perceived as one of the basic properties that set apart sensemaking from cognitive psychology¹⁵³. Identity is the core that defines the character of both the individual and an organisation. In identity construction, sensemaking begins first with the sense-maker as an individual. It begins with a deep self-imposed question such as: How can I know what I think until I see what I say¹⁵⁴. This means knowing is not in thoughts but

¹⁴⁹ Weick, K., 1995, pp. 7 & 13.

¹⁵⁰ Taylor, J.R., Van Every, E.J., 2000. *The Emergent Organisation: Communication as its Site and Surface*. Erlbaum, Mahwah, N.J

¹⁵¹ Weick, K., 1995

¹⁵² Weick, K., 1995, p.18.

¹⁵³ Gililand, S.W., Day, D.V., 2000. Business Management, F.T Durso, (ed), *Handbook of Applied Cognition*, Wiley: New York, pp. 315-342.

¹⁵⁴ Weick, K., 1995, p.18.

rather in seeing the thoughts being constructed into some form of identity. Thoughts have to change from being abstract to something concrete in order to make sense. In other words, believing is in seeing.

Any sense-maker in Mead's contention is a parliament of selves¹⁵⁵. This means the individual action is always influenced by the actual or imagined presence of others. In this perspective, an individual is an actor that is puzzled, confused, faced with uncertainties and ambiguous situations. The individual begins with himself or herself with respect to the situation beforehand. The situation only invokes the process of identity construction.

Furthermore, identity construction is self-referential. For example, 'how can I know who I am until I see what I do'¹⁵⁶. At this stage, the sense-maker undergoes a continual process of redefining himself or herself whilst presenting some self to others and at the same time, deciding which self is most appropriate. In other words, depending on who the sense-maker finds himself/herself to be, the perspective and definition of what is out there will also change. What is out there is self-referenced to the sense-maker.

In sensemaking, self rather than the environment is sometimes the text that requires interpretation. The sense-maker makes sense of whatever happens around himself/herself by asking what implications the prevailing circumstances have for who the sense-maker shall be. This means the prevailing situations will be defined by who the sense-maker chooses to become whilst dealing with it. The sense-maker derives cues as to what the situation means from the kind of self that feels appropriate to deal with and much less from what is going on out there. There are two important processes that take place simultaneously and in a mutually inclusive manner, namely, the quest for meaning-making through object interpretation and appropriate and comfortable identity construction of the actor.

Meaning making is commensurable to the identity type the meaning-maker feels would be appropriate and comfortable with. Sensemaking, filtered through issues of identity, is shaped by the recipe 'how can I know who we are becoming until I see what they say and do with our actions'¹⁵⁷. Identity construction shows that when people face unfamiliar situations, they translate into questions such as who are we, what are we doing, what matters and why does it

¹⁵⁵ Mead, G.H., 1956. *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead* (A.M. Strauss, ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

¹⁵⁶ Weick, K., 1995, p.23.

¹⁵⁷ Weick, K., Sutcliffe, K.M and Obstfeld, D. 2005. Organising and the Process of Sensemaking. *Organisation Science*, 16 (4), pp. 409-421.

matter¹⁵⁸.

According to Porac et al.,¹⁵⁹ identity construction engenders organisational beliefs to individuals and layers of management on 'who am I', 'who are they', and 'who are we'. It is this consensual identity and causal belief constructed by individuals and senior managers that make sense of transactions within their competitive environment and inform their strategic activities and individual conduct. The identity in this case serves as a framework within which one can place stimuli for interpretations, meaning making and appropriate action.

In essence, the main argument in identity construction is that people, as individuals and collectives in different capacities, first construct their identities: who am I and who are we in order to contextualise and deduce their interpretation, meaning making and actions on situations before them. People do not make sense and act beyond their level of self - comprehension. It is who they perceive themselves to be that make them to derive meaning the way they do. Action becomes a by-product of how one understands who he or she is.

4.3.2 Sense is made in Retrospect

Karl Weick's argument is that a specific meaning always arises retrospectively. It takes the comprehension of the past for the present to be understood. The present is interpreted through the lens of the past. The uncertainties of the present are easily dissected and demystified with comfort through what people know and are acquainted with.

To illustrate retrospective meaning making, Karl Weick used a metaphor of a cone of light which, when reflected on an object, radiates its light backwards. When radiating the light backwards, the cone of light begins with the immediate and its targeted object. The backward reflection of light brings that which was not known or understood into light in order to help in meaning making of the present. The creation of meaning becomes an attentional process to that

¹⁵⁸ Coopey, et al. 1997, p.312 cited in Brown 2000, note: Faced with events that disrupt normal expectations and hence the efficacy of established patterns of meaning and associated behaviour, individuals attempt to make sense of ambiguous stimuli in ways that respond to their own identity needs. They are able to draw creatively on their memory especially their personal experience in composing a story that begins to make sense of what is happening while potentially enhancing their feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy. The story is a sufficiently plausible account of what is happening out there that it can serve as a landscape within which they and others might be able to make commitments and to act in ways that serve to establish new meanings and patterns of behaviour.

¹⁵⁹ Porac, J.F., Thomas, H. and Baden-Fuller, C., 1989. Competitive groups as cognitive communities: The case of Scottish knitwear manufacturers. *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 26, pp. 397-416.

which has already occurred.

It is this metaphor that Karl Weick borrowed from Schultz to define retrospective sensemaking as meaning of a lived experience¹⁶⁰. This means actions are known only when they have been completed. Whatever is now or underway will determine the meaning of whatever has just occurred. However, the meaning is not attached to the kind of attention that is directed to the experience. The meaning of a lived experience undergoes modifications depending on the particular kind of attention the ego gives to that lived experience.

It is also the reconstruction of the past, giving rationality, clarity and order where rationality may not have been present at the time of the event reviewed. The retrospective reconstruction of the past is partial simply because some aspects of the past whose outcomes are known may have been erased. The partial erasing means that the recollection and reconstruction of the past is not necessarily a replication of the true events. It makes the reconstruction of the past a bit subjective as it depends on the recollection of the past events. Time lapse always plays a part in memory lapse. When rationality, clarity and order have been arrived at, then sensemaking processes come to an end as the goal has been achieved.

In everyday life, retrospective sensemaking involves short time spans between act and reflection. Memory traces are fresh and rich with indeterminacy, and people are mindful of a handful of projects at the time they look back over what has just happened. Retrospection only makes the past clearer than the present or future. It does not make the past transparent¹⁶¹. It is also mood congruent, which means that people remember events that have the same emotional tone as what they currently feel¹⁶². In organisational studies, much of the organisational operations such as strategy making are based on retrospective experience¹⁶³. This is because it is easier to make sense of events when they are placed in the past than in the present or future.

However, in reviewing sensemaking in retrospect, Gioia and Mehra¹⁶⁴ argue that there is a need for a meaning making for the future. The future cannot be left ambiguous. Future meaning making is necessary to minimise future uncertainties. People derive some degree of comfort

¹⁶⁰ Schutz, A., 1967. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. Evanston, H: Northwestern University Press.

¹⁶¹ Starbuck, W.H. and Milliken, F.J., 1988, pp. 39-40.

¹⁶² Snyder, M., White, P., 1982. Moods and memories: Elation, depression and remembering of the events of one's life. *Journal of Personality*, Vol. 50, pp. 149-167.

¹⁶³ Mintzberg, H., 1978, Patterns in Strategy Formation. *Management Science*, Vol. 24, pp. 934-948.

¹⁶⁴ Gioia, D.A., Mehra, A., 1996. A Review of Sensemaking in Organisations, *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, (October 1996).

when they at least have a sense of what the future holds. In other words, this brings up the need of a prospective sense. Prospective sensemaking is applicable at both personal and organisational levels. Future prospects of organisations are encroached in what is called organisational strategy. In an organisational strategy, there is a long term view of the future status and direction of the organisation. It is an attempt to imagine with degree of certainty the unimaginable in order to deal and manage it. Chantel Ilbury and Clem Sunter¹⁶⁵ refer to this as the scenario planning. It is a planning exercise that is foregrounded on scenarios which attempt to predict possible outcomes of various strategic decision makings. This is all contained in a book which Chantel and Sunter titled ‘The Mind of a Fox’¹⁶⁶.

4.3.3 Sense is enactive of Sensible Environments

Both identity construction and retrospect of sensemaking provide sensory properties associated with sensemaking. What they do not cover though is the process and the activity of making that which is sensed. The activity of sensemaking is implied in identity construction and retrospect sensemaking. Such an action is a precondition for both properties.

Enactment is about the activity of making that which is sensed¹⁶⁷. The argument here is that the reality is enacted upon. The environment is not monolithic, singular, fixed and detached from and external to people. People act on their environment and thereby create the environment. The environment, on the other hand, creates them. As people act on their environment, they create materials that become both constraints and opportunities they face. Follet¹⁶⁸ refers to this as a creating process. To illustrate this creative process, he uses a metaphor of a farmer who owns a vineyard. In this metaphor, the farmer prunes, grafts, and fertilizes certain trees. During this process, trees release energy to the pruner and also release energy to trees to bear much fruits. The farmer thinks, plans, works and makes the trees to bear fruits. It is a process of freeing both sides. This makes action an important part of sensemaking.

The enactment process is not only about the activity of making that which is sensed but further

¹⁶⁵ Ilbury, C. and Sunter, C., 2011. *The Fox Trilogy: Imagining the unimaginable and dealing with it*. Human and Rousseau: Tafelberg.

¹⁶⁶ We chose the title “The Mind of a Fox” to contrast our way of thinking about the future with what was conventionally being taught.....the hedgehog approach. The fox knows many things but the hedgehog knows one big thing...p.11.

¹⁶⁷ Weick, K., 1995, p.30.

¹⁶⁸ Follet, M.P. 1924. *Creative Experience*. New York: Longmans, Green.

embeds aspects of realism by putting emphasis on bracketing and punctuating¹⁶⁹. When people bracket, they act as if there is something out there to be discovered. They act like realists and forget that the nominalist in them uses *a priori* beliefs and explanations to find seams worth punctuating¹⁷⁰. When put differently, Czarniawska-Joerges¹⁷¹ says:

‘a stone exists independently of our cognition, but we enact it by a cognitive bracketing and concentrating our attention on it’.

This means the process of sensemaking begins from the need of individuals to construct an external factual order out there or to recognise that there is an external reality in the social relationships¹⁷². In other words, people act in such a way that their assumptions of realism become warranted. Enactment becomes an activity through which a socially constructed reality is bracketed and punctuated so that it can make sense. Weick¹⁷³ argues that it is this institutionalising of social constructions into the way things are done and the transmission of things that links ideas about sensemaking with those of institutional theory. Institutional theorists assert that the institutional environment can strongly influence development of formal structures in an organisation¹⁷⁴. Sensemaking is the feedstock for institutionalisation.

In summary, enactment is primarily about action in the world and not about conceptual pictures of that world. Action is belief driven, so when the beliefs and actions are closely linked, then there is sensemaking although separating the two is sometimes difficult. In most instances, beliefs and actions inform one another. Belief-driven sensemaking appears as arguing and expecting whilst action-driven sensemaking shows up as manipulating or committing. From an organisational sensemaking perspective, commitment is focused on a single action which often requires specific situations to take place. Such an action often results in an orderly logic, detailed, stronger and binding actions. Manipulation focuses on multiple simultaneous actions to make the environment much clearer, manageable and comprehensible.

¹⁶⁹ Weick, K., 1995.

¹⁷⁰ Starbuck, W.H. and Milleken, F.J., 1988, p.50.

¹⁷¹ Czarniawska-Joerges, B., 1992. *Exploring Complex Organisations: A Cultural Perspective*. Nebury Park, CA: Sage.

¹⁷² Ring, P.S. and Van de Ven, A.H., 1989. Formal and informal dimensions of transactions. In: A.H. Van de Ven, H.L., Angle and M.S., Poole (Eds), *Research on the Management of Innovation: The Minnesota Studies*, pp. 171-192. New York: Ballinger.

¹⁷³ Weick, K., 1995, p. 36.

¹⁷⁴ DiMaggio, P.J. and Powel, W.W. 1991. ‘Introduction’. In. P.J. DiMaggio and W. Powel (eds), *The New Institutionalism and Organisational Analysis*, pp. 1-38, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

4.3.4 Sense as a social Activity

“Those who forget that sensemaking is a social process miss a constant substrate that shapes interpretations and interpreting. Conduct is contingent on the conduct of others whether those others are imagined or physically present.....¹⁷⁵”

The argument here is that human thinking (cognitive) and functioning are an intertwined social process. Thoughts, feelings and behaviour of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others¹⁷⁶. In recognition of this social relationship, Walsh and Ungson¹⁷⁷ define an organisation as a network of inter-subjectively shared meanings that are sustained through the development and use of a common language and everyday social interactions. This definition is social as it makes references to concepts such as networks, inter-subjectiveness, shared meanings, common language and social interaction.

Burns and Stalker¹⁷⁸ concur with the social dimension of sensemaking when organisations make decisions. They have argued that decisions in organisations are made either in the presence of others or with the knowledge that they will have to be implemented or understood or approved by others. In concurrence with this view, Kahlebaugh¹⁷⁹ argues that an individual creates novel thoughts in the context of interactions with others and then communicates them to the larger community. If viable, the larger community generalises these ideas such that they become part of their culture. Even monologues and one-way communications presume an audience, and the monologue changes as the audience changes. This means sensemaking cannot be devoid of the social aspect because even what a person does internally is contingent on others. Blumer¹⁸⁰ refers to this as symbolic interaction. Any form of individual thinking and analysis that overlooks the social substrate tends to have theoretical obstacles that are distracting.

4.3.5 Sense as Ongoing

The main argument in sensemaking as on-going is that life is always truncated into different

¹⁷⁵ Weick, K., 1995, p.39

¹⁷⁶ Allport, G.W., 1985. The historical background of social psychology. In: G. Lindzey and E. Aronson, (eds). *Handbook of Social Psychology*, (3rd ed.), Vol. 1, pp.1-46, New York: Random House.

¹⁷⁷ Walsh, J.P. and Ungson, G.R., 1991. Organisational Memory. *Academy of Management Review*. Vol. 16, pp. 57-91.

¹⁷⁸ Burns, T. and Stalker, G.M., 1961. *The Management of Innovation*. London: Tavistock.

¹⁷⁹ Kahlbaugh, P.A., 1993. James Mark Baldwin: A bridge between social and cognitive theories of development. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, Vol. 23, pp. 79-103.

¹⁸⁰ Blumer, H. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

events; the world is continuous and dynamic, and managing is an on-going flow of actions and words in an organisation which is punctuated by events such as planning (strategy), budget meetings. This all makes sensemaking an on-going process which neither starts nor stops¹⁸¹. There are no absolute starting points, no self-evident, self-contained certainties on which to build because individuals always find themselves in the middle of complex situations that they try to disentangle by making and revising provisional assumptions at the same time. People only chop moments out of continuous flows and extract cues from those moments. Of critical importance is that these on-going flows also do take place independently of human intentions. Cohen, March and Olsen¹⁸² subscribe to this reality of continuity, thrownness and flows in that streams of problems, solutions and choices flow through organisations and converge and diverge independent of human intentions.

Winograd and Flores¹⁸³ describe on-going flows in terms of six different properties, namely:

- a. You cannot avoid acting: Your actions affect the situation and yourself and often against your will;
- b. You cannot step back and reflect on your actions: You are thrown on your intuitions and have to deal with whatever comes up as it comes up;
- c. The effects of action cannot be predicted: The dynamic nature of social conduct precludes accurate prediction;
- d. You do not have a stable representation of the situation: Patterns may be evident after the fact but at the time the flow unfolds, there is nothing but arbitrary fragments capable of being organised into a host of different patterns or possibly no pattern whatsoever;
- e. Every representation is an interpretation: There is no way to settle the debate that any interpretation is right or wrong, which means an objective analysis of that into which one was thrown, is impossible; and
- f. Language is action: Whenever people say something, they create rather than describe a situation, which means it is impossible to stay detached from whatever emerges unless you say nothing, which is such a strange way to react that the situation is deflected anyway.

¹⁸¹ Weick, K., 1995

¹⁸² Cohen, M.D., March, J.G., Olsen, J.P., 1972, A garbage can model of organisational choice, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 17, pp. 1-25.

¹⁸³ Winograd, T. and Flores, F., 1986. *Understanding Computers and Cognition: A new Foundation for Design*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

What these properties point to is that an individual is always in on-going actions which both affect the situations and the individual at the same time. This dynamic nature of social conduct often precludes any accurate prediction. Patterns may be evident after the fact but at the time that the flow unfolds, there is nothing but arbitrary fragments capable of being organised into a host of different patterns or possibly no pattern whatsoever. This makes objective analysis of what the individual is to be thrown into almost impossible.

4.3.6 Sense is focused on and by extracted Cues

Extracted cues are defined as simply, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring¹⁸⁴. A seed is a form-producing process that captures the vagueness and indeterminacy of sensemaking. According to Weick,¹⁸⁵ the actions of a seed resemble those of the documentary method where a specific observation is linked with a general form or idea in the interest of meaning making. This linkage helps to clarify the meaning of the particular which then alters slightly the general. During this process, the abstract and the concrete inform and construct one another. Actions create the conditions for further actions,¹⁸⁶ the course of which remains vague prospectively but clearer in retrospect.

In terms of this property of sensemaking, the main argument is that sensemaking is contingent upon paying more attention to sufficient cues for coordination. Such cues may include prototypes, stereotypes and roles¹⁸⁷. However, what cues will become depends on context in that the context first, affects the extraction of cues such as search, scanning¹⁸⁸ and noticing¹⁸⁹ and second, it affects how the extracted cues get interpreted. The concept of frame is used as a shorthand for the structure of the context.

This means without a supplied context, objects and events have equivocal or multiple meanings. For instance, the indexical property of talk is the fact that people often do not state the intended meaning of the expressions they use. The expressions, on their own, are vague and equivocal, thus lending themselves to several meanings. The meaning of expressions cannot be decided unless a context is supplied. Leiter¹⁹⁰ outlines indexicality to the contextual

¹⁸⁴ Weick, K., 1995.

¹⁸⁵ Weick, K., 1993

¹⁸⁶ Shotter, J., 1983, p. 156.

¹⁸⁷ Miller, D., 1993. The architecture of simplicity. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18, pp. 116-138.

¹⁸⁸ Daft, R.L. and Weick, K.E., 1984. Toward a model of organisations as interpretation systems. *Academy of Management Review*, 9, pp. 284-295.

¹⁸⁹ Starbuck, W.H. and Milliken, F.J., 1988.

¹⁹⁰ Leiter, K., 1980. *A Primer on Ethnomethodology*, New York: Springer.

nature of objects and events without which both remain equivocal and with multiple meaning. Context, be it social, provides a fundamental basis for interpretation which Mailloux¹⁹¹ refers to as the politics of interpretation. This refers to an interpretive approach to political science which provides accounts of actions and practices that are interpretations of interpretations. The interpretive approach concentrates on meanings, beliefs and discourse as opposed to laws and rules.

4.3.7 Sense is driven by Plausibility rather than Accuracy

What is central in this property of sensemaking is that the quest for meaning is not about the truth and getting things right. Instead, it is about an on-going process of redrafting of an emerging story to make it more comprehensive and incorporates more of the observed data to make it credible to most people. However, what becomes plausible to one group may be implausible to the other group. This makes sensemaking not necessarily to be about accuracy rather than plausibility¹⁹². The view of sensemaking being plausible rather accurate is in constant conflict with other academic theories and managerial practices whose assumptions are more on accuracy of the phenomena than otherwise.

The assumption that accuracy begets effectiveness builds on a stream of research on environmental scanning, strategic planning, rational choice and organisational adaptation¹⁹³. Nevertheless, Marzias and Starbuck¹⁹⁴ have drawn a conclusion that even when people fail to perceive problems accurately, they still act effectively by making sense of the circumstances in ways that appear to move towards general long-term goals. They argue that in organisations, problems must be bracketed from an amorphous stream of experience and be labeled as relevant before on-going action can be focused on them.

Furthermore, managers have limited attention, yet they face many issues, often evaluating several situations, interpretations, choices and actions simultaneously. Therefore, people do not need any accuracy to perceive prevailing situations. They simply act effectively by making sense of circumstances in ways that appear to move towards general long-term goals. In essence, plausible stories keep things moving and in the process of action-making, they

¹⁹¹ Mailloux, S. 1990. Interpretation. In: F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, (eds.), *Critical terms for literary study*, pp. 121-134, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

¹⁹² Weick, K., Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005.

¹⁹³ Gavetti, G., Levinthal, D., 2000. Looking forward and looking backward: Cognitive and experiential search. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Vol. 45, pp. 113-137.

¹⁹⁴ Marzias, J.M., Starbuck, W.H., 2003. Managers and their inaccurate perceptions: Good, bad or inconsequential? *British Journal Management*, Vol. 14, pp. 3-19.

generate new data and create opportunities for dialogue and persuasion that enrich the sense of what is going on¹⁹⁵. Actions enable people to assess causal beliefs that result into new actions that test the newly asserted relationships. Over time, as supporting evidence mounts, significant changes in beliefs and actions evolve.

Plausible reasoning involves going beyond the observable and consensual information to form ideas and understanding that provide sufficient clarity. This logical deductive departure process is grounded on the fact that reasoning fits in the facts albeit imperfectly at times and second, it is based on incomplete information¹⁹⁶. According to Sutcliffe,¹⁹⁷ inaccurate information under certain conditions may lead to positive consequences. This implies that misconceptions may be beneficial if they enable managers to overcome inertial tendencies and propel them to pursue goals that might look unattainable in environments assessed in utter objectivity. Since environments are not necessarily seen accurately, managers may undertake potentially difficult courses of action with the enthusiasm, effort and self-confidence necessary to bring about success. Having an accurate environmental map brings order to the world and prompts action.

In a nutshell, this means sensemaking, as a perspective, does not rely on accuracy, and its model is not object perception. Instead, it is about plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, invention and instrumentality. This means sensemaking takes a relative approach to truth and is anchored on a predicted belief that people will believe what can account for sensory experience and what is also interesting, attractive, emotionally appealing and goal relevant.

4.4 Sense as Belief and Action Driven

Besides the seven properties of sensemaking which Weick sees as distinct characteristics of sensemaking, he has further outlined two structures that predispose sensemaking, namely, belief and action driven processes¹⁹⁸ as shown in Table 4.5.1. The two structures do not only predetermine the form of sensemaking but undergird the process of sensemaking. Both belief and action driven processes are closely linked to one another. In belief-driven processes,

¹⁹⁵ Sutcliffe, 2000.

¹⁹⁶ Isenberg, D.J., (1986). The structure and process of understanding: Implications for managerial action. In: H.P. Sims, Jr and D.A. Gioia (Eds.). *The Thinking Organisation*, pp. 238-262, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

¹⁹⁷ Sutcliffe, 1994.

¹⁹⁸ Weick, K.E, 1995, p.135.

Weick has identified arguing and expecting as two forms of sensemaking whereas in action driven processes, he has identified committing and manipulating as forms of sensemaking.

In belief driven process, sensemaking takes place when people in their respective groups make sense of the situations at hand by connecting pieces of information at their disposal into larger structures of meaning around plausible cues and what they believe is sufficiently clear. In the event of the similarity of cues where they are able to fit them together within the existing frames, the kind of sense they make is called *expecting*. It is called *expecting* simply because there is no anomaly between what they have expected and what is obtained. It becomes a situation of 'we thought so'. It is like a given situation.

However, in the event that the pieces of information and frames of reference are conflicting with each other, this gives rise to another form of sensemaking which Weick refers to it as arguing. Arguing, according to Weick, is reasoned discourse when taking place at an individual level but has a social meaning at an organisational level where people express the contradictions that are implicit to positions that are articulated.

Arguments are like tentative proposals that both need to be elaborated on and tested at the same time until a clearer picture emerges. It is arguing in the sense that the contradictions revolve around the thinking of people from one critical idea to others through constructive debates that involve comparison, developing and presenting new explanations to the phenomenon. What happens is that as people constructively engage each other, they do not only share information but also deepen their insights on the issues at hand. As they become much more enlightened through the illumination of their minds by exchange of information and ideas, their level of understanding gets better without necessarily flaring tempers and pounding fists.

Arguing is mostly common in formal and informal gatherings where people often share both their explicit and implicit understanding of issues. In the process of arguing, people resolve and reduce ambiguity, discover new goals and enhance the quality and understanding of available information and clarify new ideas. Weick has identified five generic distinct properties of arguing as follows:

- ☐ An inferential leap from existing beliefs to the adoption of a new belief or the reinforcement of an old one;
- ☐ Perceived rationale to justify that leap;

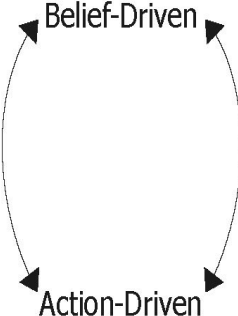
- A choice among two or more competing claims;
- Regulation of uncertainty in relation to the selected claim; and
- Willingness to risk a confrontation of that claim with one's peers

All the five properties are interrelated and during an act of sensemaking, they can range along a continuum from argument to non-argument.

In action-driven structures, groups of people develop interconnected and interrelated meanings around actions, commitments or manipulations. They do this by modifying cognitive structures to give significance to these actions. When they modify cognitive structures, there are two actions that give rise to sensemaking, namely, committing and manipulating actions. Sensemaking through action by committing takes place when there are contradictions between beliefs and behaviours. Behaviours refer to explicit actions that have not only occurred but are also known to public and therefore irrevocable. Their irrevocability is based on the fact that they cannot be reversed, manipulated or denied to have taken place. Their reality state becomes a reason for them constituting a framework for sensemaking. They become a past that influences and serves as a reference framework to predict and interpret the present situations. For instance, information is organised through the lens of the committed actions. Perceptions are made based on what has been committed already.

Action-driven sensemaking by manipulating takes place when, for instance, the organisation decides to identify and focus on certain niche areas and influences clients and personnel to prioritise their pre-selected activities and products. This is manipulating as clients are provided with a pre-determined framework to make sense of the products and activities. Even though there is no direct imposition of what they should do, their reasoning is influenced towards a particular way of seeing things.

Table 4.5.1 below provides a summary of both the belief and action-driven sensemaking structures. It identifies the four frame types from the two structures of sensemaking and how each of the frames helps in meaning construction. In a belief-driven structure, the meaning is constructed by connecting, contradicting and similar perceptions. However, in action-driven structures, meaning construction is through irrevocable actions and influence.

Sensemaking Processes	Frame Types	Meaning Construction
	Arguing	Creates meaning by connecting the contradictory
	Expecting	Creates meaning by connecting the similar
	Committing	Creates meaning to justify actions, high in choice, visibility and irrevocability
	Manipulating	Creates meaning to explain actions taken to make things happen

Source: Adapted from: Chum Wei Choo, 1998, p.78

However, Karl Weick's classic text, *Sensemaking in Organisation*, which he published in 1995 subsequently served as catalyst for more empirical research in sensemaking and its application in organisations. Empirical research has been conducted in various contexts using different rigorous methodologies. Throughout the research work, scholars have agreed mainly on two key points about sensemaking, namely, it is a theoretical framework that provides clarity on the process on how the inter-subjective meaning is created and secondly, it enables organisations in the successful delivery on major organisational processes such as organisational change, learning, creativity and innovation¹⁹⁹.

Research on sensemaking and its application, post Karl Weick's book (1995) on *Sensemaking in Organisations*, has been phenomenal such that it has resulted in the identification of various forms of sensemaking perspectives based on different contexts²⁰⁰. For instance, some are based

¹⁹⁹ Maitlis, S. and Christianson, M. 2014, *The Academy of Management Annals*, Vol. 8, No., 1, pp. 57-125.

²⁰⁰ Maitlis, S. and Christianson, M. 2014, p. 67.

on the applications of sensemaking to particular contexts such as ecological and market sensemaking. Others refer to the nature of cues or content of the sense made such as the intercultural, interpersonal and pro-social sensemaking. Other forms of sensemaking identified include prospective and future-oriented sensemaking.

All these forms of sensemaking point to one thing, that is, people in all spheres of life make sense and that sensemaking is on-going. More of these forms of sensemaking are identified and defined in table 4.5.2 below:

Forms of Sensemaking	Definitions
Constituent-minded	The process by which a sense-maker draws a conclusion on a matter on the basis of professional standards, rational analysis or biases and the anticipated prejudices.
Cultural	This refers to the way communities make sense of venture failures.
Ecological	This refers to the process used to make sense of material landscapes and ecological processes.
Environmental	This is a process where actors do not only make sense of the event but also the broader organisational field of the event.
Future-oriented	This refers to a process where the inter-subjective meanings, images and schemes are constructed from conversations to project future objects and phenomena.
Intercultural	This refers to a process where meaning is constructed from the selection of scripts that reflect individuals' cultural values and history.
Interpersonal	This refers to the role of interpersonal cues in helping employees make meaning from their jobs, roles and levels at work.
Market	This refers to macro version of Karl Weick's approach to the way meaning is generally constructed in organisations.
Political	This refers to the way social actors construct the relationship between multinational enterprises and their multiple local contexts.
Pro-social	This refers to how employees interpret personal and company actions and identities as caring.
Prospective	This is about how the intentional future impact of certain actions and non-actions influence the process of meaning construction.

Resourceful	This refers to a process in which one is able to appreciate the perspectives of others and use their understanding to enact the horizon-expanding discourse.
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Source: Adapted from: Maitlis, S. and Christianson, M. 2014, p. 68

The above forms of sensemaking and how they are described clearly indicate that sensemaking is a process that permeates every form of creation of meaning through interpretation for the subsequent understanding of the phenomenon. What is considered to be the quest for meaning construction is consequent to a trigger or triggers often referred to as the discrepancy between what is expected and the reality out there or what is experienced. In the sensemaking perspective, the triggers are summarily called *cues*. Cues may take different forms such as events, issues and situations. The cues are naturally ambiguous, and their outcomes are uncertain. When such cues are observed, they interrupt the individual's pattern of thought processes, the understanding of the world and thereby create uncertainties about what should be expected.

4.5 Implications of the Properties of Sensemaking for Leadership

In this chapter, it has been explained that Weick has mainly identified, examined and used the seven properties construct to explain what sensemaking is and how it takes place in broad terms. He has not necessarily linked them to organisational contexts or leadership. Therefore, in Weick's context of properties of sensemaking, there is no defined link or direct application of them beyond the individual level. He does not present them as the norm of how things should go. However, notwithstanding Weick's perspective, these properties of sensemaking are arguably applicable to leadership processes as discussed below. They serve as a useful theoretical construct for effective leadership.

4.5.1 Leadership and Identity Construction

When analysing leadership within the context of sensemaking, Thayer²⁰¹ argues that a leader is the:

²⁰¹ Thayer, L. 1988. Leadership/ Communication: A Critical Review and Modest Proposal. In: G.M Goldhaber and G.A Barnett (eds.), *Handbook of Organisational Communication*, pp. 231-263, Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

“One who alters or guides the manner in which his or her followers mind the world by giving it a compelling face. A leader at work is the one who gives others a different sense of the meaning of that which they do by recreating it in a different form, a different face, in the same way that a pivotal painter or sculpture or poet gives those who follow him or her a different way of seeing and therefore saying and doing and knowing in the world. A leader does not tell it “as it is”, he/ she tells it as it might be, giving what is there by a different face... The leader is a sense-giver. The leader always embodies the possibilities of escape from what might otherwise appear to us to be incomprehensible or from what might otherwise appear to us to be chaotic, indifferent or incorrigible world – one which we have no ultimate control”.

From this argument, one can arrive to a generality that leadership is a process that revolves around the individuals or groups as actors in sensemaking and sense-giving. Both sensemaking and sense-giving influence people in whatever capacity to act in a certain way for a particular objective. Action always precedes a decision even if the decision is spontaneous or not. They act out of a sense they have about the situation. As they make sense, they construct the identity. They construct the identity for self-reference purposes.

Identity construction takes place when there is self-discovery, self-reference and self-establishment. Self-discovery is about the individual constructing his or her identity. The individual discovers who he or she is. Self-discovery is spontaneous sometimes and a way in which the individual re-groups to construct an identity that will precede interpretation and meaning making of the situation. It is this ‘knowing who I am’ that will stimulate a particular way of thought process and insight to arrive at a perspective about the situation. An insight about a situation through self-discovery and self-reference will result into some form of action.

The process of ‘knowing who I am’ is important because the process of interpretation and meaning making is, by nature, self-referential. What is sensed and seen bears on the actor’s identity. In other words, an individual tends to act with greater influence from self. This means a leader will become the first referral point to say ‘I interpret and make sense of the situation because of who I am’. The level of interpretation and meaning-making never exceeds the measure of conjured self-identity.

In organisations, this is best illustrated through organisational structures with hierarchies and distinct roles associated with those hierarchical levels. First, a person is appointed to a designated position and that designation instills a sense of identity and anticipated functions

associated with it. For instance, an individual would be referred to as a manager (*identity*); as a manager under the observation of other managers and subordinates, s/he would interpret and make sense of the situation through the lens of being a manager, so self-reference is unavoidable.

In essence, leadership is about people, both as individuals and as a collective, functioning in different capacities constructing their identities in order to contextualise, interpret and make meaning of themselves and situations at hand. The leadership process is never beyond the leader's level of self-comprehension. It takes who they choose to be in order to interpret and have sense that serves as a basis for action. In other words, identity construction refers to how the text is constructed, interpreted and read. The text is not constructed, interpreted and read in the same way because leaders are 'parliament' of themselves. However, identity construction helps leaders to see what they want, read into things the meaning they wish to see by vesting objects, utterances and actions with subjective meaning, which make them act intelligently but without necessarily being objective.

A typical example could be drawn from the speech of the former President, Thabo Mbeki at the adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitutional Bill on the 8th of May 1996 in Cape Town. He carefully constructed an identity in the title of the speech 'I am an African'²⁰². This later provided frames for his leadership prowess when he became the President of the Republic of South Africa. Programmes that stemmed from this identity construction include the African Renaissance. It was this identity of '*Africanness*' that constituted the basis of his leadership.

However, it is important to note that an individual's identity construction never takes place in isolation of other people. It is always influenced by the presence of other people. Who the individual chooses to become, the manner in which the situation is interpreted and the subsequent actions thereof all take place against the backdrop of what the individual thinks, perceives and expects of others. There is a sense from the actor of 'who am I to them' or 'who I think I am to them'. This makes identity construction a process of multiple activities taking place at the same time. There is self-construction, influence of others and construction of thoughts from abstract to concrete for interpretation and meaning making. This is applicable

²⁰² <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4322>

to leadership as well, and leaders are always cognisant of others. It is always leadership in the context of others.

4.5.2 Leadership and Retrospection

The sensemaking in retrospect process is about subjectively selecting moments out of the past. An individual chooses what to reflect on in order to have insights for decisions towards the future. The decisions cannot be objective as they are based on the subjectively selected moments of the past. Effective leadership focuses on objective decisions. However, the notion of the retrospective process becomes only relevant to leadership when there is an objective comprehensive review of the past in order to take the appropriate decisions for the future.

Decision making is often futuristic in nature. However, even though it remains prospective in nature, it is never de-coupled from the past. It is a futuristic process that is commenced today based on what has happened before. The ability to forecast the future is strongly dependant on how the past has been comprehended. It does not mean the decision making is a replica of the past but rather the lived experiences provide wisdom and knowledge to make sense of the present in order to predict the future. That is why the quality of leadership is often based on the past experiences. This becomes relevant when the retrospective process is applied beyond the normal sensemaking process, as presented by Weick.

The implication of this is that the past would not merely be reconstructed but instead, facts are retrieved to the extent the mind may recall them. It should not be the decision of the sense-maker to choose what to recall when it comes to effective leadership. The purpose of the retrieval is not to refresh the mind in so far as the events have unfolded but to shed more light to the present. This is the case because people tend to know what they do after they have completed it. This means whatever could still be on-going or underway is best understood through the lens of the experienced past.

Organisationally, activities such as forecasting, strategic planning, policy formulation, evaluation cannot be useful if they are decoupled from reflective action and history. These are all reflective framings. That is why both the current and future trends of organisations can best be understood in retrospect. People often talk of the organisational or institutional memory as being vital for preservation simply because in it resides the future of the organisation. Organisations invest in record keeping and archives because through those records, people are able to construct the future of the organisation.

However, as indicated earlier about the selective subjectivity of the retrospective process, it is counter-balanced through collective

reflection. The collective reflective minimises selective moments out of the past for objective decision making. Therefore, the property of a retrospective process embeds in itself critical elements of leadership if viewed and applied beyond the Weick's context.

Furthermore, the retrospective process is applicable to organisations through individuals and groups. It constitutes vital elements in the milieu of decision making. The retrospective process is not about the objectivity of the past. It is about what could be recalled and filtered through as being significant enough for the present and the near future. Through retrospect, leadership becomes a process that is informed predominantly by the recalled and lived experiences.

4.5.3 Leadership and Enactment

Leadership is undeniably a purposeful action oriented and driven process. Organisations are systems of action that are consciously and unconsciously coordinated by some form of communication. Actions can be visible and invisible sometimes. Activities such as organisational routines, policies, rules and procedures, controls and organising form part and parcel of leadership action. Action permeates the entire process of every form of leadership.

The relevance of enactment in a leadership process is that it explains various activities, both visible and invisible, that ultimately result into what is generally known as leadership activities. In enactment, there is both the process and a product. Enactment itself is a process which is social, and the product thereof is the enacted environment. Such action is borne out of the social process. This means the reality gets constructed in an undefined space and uncharted terrain. Other leadership theories have only been conceptualised around the enacted environment. This makes enactment, as a property of sensemaking, relevant. It identifies and explains process actions that underpin every form of leadership. These process actions cut across all other properties of sensemaking.

The social process of enactment is normally driven by the following knowledge types: tacit, explicit and cultural knowledge. Tacit knowledge is in the form of experience and expertise of individuals and groups. Explicit knowledge is in the form of artifacts, rules and routines and finally, cultural knowledge is in the form of assumptions, beliefs and values. The knowledge types generate shared meanings which create new knowledge through conversion, sharing and thus leading to innovations, extensions of organisational capabilities and commitment to do things differently.

An enacted environment which is the product of the social process (*shared beliefs*) serves as a residue for action. The environment is like an empty space which needs to be defined through

a social process of enactment. When people enact an undefined space, they bracket, rearrange and label portions of their experiences. For instance, individuals will rearrange data by classifying it into different groupings which are labeled. Thereafter, they superimpose past interpretations as templates to interpret selected classified data. The selection process produces an enacted sensible environment that provides cause-effect explanations of what is going on. Then there is retention whereby organisations store products of successful sensemaking for future retrieval and use.

Enactment in a leadership process is undertaken through different activities in organisations. Such activities where there is both a process and a product include competence assessments, systems of control, staffing and capacity building. Through them, organisations become much more sensible environments.

In summary, leadership entails a process of enactment. It is about action. This process is largely informed by social influence and knowledge of individuals. Knowledge is the capacity to act intelligently, and thoughtful leadership is knowledge-based.

4.5.4 Leadership and Social Construction

Sensemaking is a social construct that is underpinned by social relations and social skills between people and not objects. The conduct of a sense-maker directly and indirectly depends on the conduct and influence of others whether they are physically present or not. Actions of an individual are drawn from the influence of others and the environment. The meaning of a particular phenomenon is socially constructed. This means even though the individual is physically singular, actions are in plurality. People think and conduct themselves in the context of others. Their thoughts are infiltrated by others simply because the level of acceptance of a decision is contingent upon the extent to which others have become part of the rationale behind such ideas.

The leadership process too is a social construct. It is a process that involves social relations between people. For instance, in organisations, solutions and sharing of best practices take place in formal and informal gatherings such as workshops, meetings and when people have tea, lunch and smoke break. The conversations they have during such gatherings provide the context for the meaning making in an organisation.

In summary, leadership is a social reality. The social reality of leadership is emergent and cannot be separated from context. It remains a process and condition of an individual being in relation to others and the larger social system when making sense of the situation. Leadership

through social activities becomes an interactive process that is shaped by interactions with others. An organisation, on the other hand, is a repository of capabilities that are determined by the social knowledge embedded in individual relationships.

4.5.5 Leadership as an Ongoing Sensemaking Process

In the same way that sensemaking is on-going, leadership is a process that never starts nor stops. It is a continuous process of action that unfolds itself through a variety of decisions. It is a process that is embedded in the day-to-day living of people. The main reason behind the on-going nature of leadership as it applies in sensemaking is that people are continuously in search of meaning. People are constantly in the center of things which require reading, interpretation and meaning-making. They always create a sensible environment, and a sensible environment is an enacted environment

The key thing about on-going flows in sensemaking is not that the quest for meaning making never gets to a stage where a sense that has been arrived at is acceptable. Instead, whenever there is some form of interruption and change, such begins to elicit flows towards sensemaking. This explains why sensemaking never begins or stops. Flows are the constants of sensemaking²⁰³. Sensemaking is momentary in one's on-going experience.

In organisations, on-going flows take place through various activities such as the policy development and reviews, application of rules and the organisational culture. As employees internalise policy implementation, they invariably identify gaps and sometimes develop better ways in which to realise the intended purposes of the policy. This also applies to organisational culture. The longer people remain in the employ of an organisation, the more they understand the organisational culture and as they understand it, they also influence change in it. Therefore, the on-going process of sensemaking equally applies to the leadership process.

4.5.6 Leadership, Frames and Cues

Like in sensemaking, leadership deals with puzzles and uncertainties such as paradoxes, dilemmas, complexities and unpredictabilities. Sensemaking is about how leaders make sense of the puzzles through interpretation, meaning making and appropriate action. This property of sensemaking explains such a process which every individual goes through in order to make sense of the puzzles and uncertainties. The argument is that individuals are always faced with what is beyond their comprehension due to limited intellectual capacity and fluid nature of things. In sensemaking, individuals choose what to focus on, thereby alienating certain events

²⁰³ Weick, K.E. 1995, p.42

and phenomena from others like the case in the retrospective process. In other words, people decide on what to pay attention to from a milieu of things. They single out what Weick refers to as the ‘what’ and thereafter embellish what has been singled out as food for thought²⁰⁴. Food for thought is what individuals choose to focus on. The choice of focus may be intentional or unintentional and spontaneous at the same time. The focus is viewed by Weick as a seed from which a larger sense of what happens is derived²⁰⁵. The focus is on extracted cues. Cues in organisations are what Weick refers to as minimal sensible structures that are drawn from existing frames²⁰⁶. They are specifics from generalities. Generalities and the total picture of the environment are frames from which specifics (cues) are drawn.

Cues exist in frames and not the other way round. Frames include ideologies, paradigms, theories, tradition and stories. The identity of cues depends on the situational context and what the sense-maker will feel comfortable with. The situational context, in turn, determines the extraction of cues and their interpretation. In other words, context serves not only as a basis for the extraction of cues but also for their interpretation. This is expressed by Smircich and Morgan when they argue that leadership largely generates a point of reference against which a feeling of organising and direction can emerge²⁰⁷.

The relevance of this property to leadership is the jargon of frames and cues. They are useful and applicable to leadership. Chapter 5 of the thesis examines the importance of cues and frames in leadership and how the understanding of cues and frames can help improve leadership. Cues and frames are examined beyond Weick’s perspective of sensemaking. They are viewed as important concepts for effective leadership. Cues and frames are examined beyond the subjective retrospection, identity construction and plausibility. For instance, in the event of an autonomic arousal in the organisation, an increase in cues becomes the way to go.

4.5.7 Leadership and Sensemaking as driven by Plausibility

Weick argues that the realist ontology²⁰⁸ where something out there has to be sensed and registered accurately is not applicable in real life. Accuracy is always in relative terms. It is a degree to which something makes sense at the time and is close to the reality. Therefore

²⁰⁴ Weick, K.E, 1995, p. 61-62

²⁰⁵ Weick, KE, 1982, p.50

²⁰⁶ Weick, KE, 1995.

²⁰⁷ Smircich and Morgan, 1982, p. 258

²⁰⁸ Weick, KE, 1995, p.55

sensemaking is about plausibility and not accuracy²⁰⁹. A plausible understanding is like a map that enables the sense-makers to have a better grasp of what is taking place in their environment. In leadership, such an insight into what is happening in the environment may facilitate leadership activities such as visioning, relating and inventing.

Plausibility refers to thinking that is reasonable to the sense-maker but also resonates well with other people. The reasonableness of thoughts and actions take place when they are innovatively and coherently constructed retrospectively by using past experiences and expectations. Weick refers to this as idealist ontology as it suggests that there is something out there that needs to be made sensible²¹⁰. Facts are bracketed and fitted in to constitute the basis for interpretation. The aim of plausible reasoning is to provide clarity on observable phenomena for a good story to tell. The story to tell must be understood by other people. The story is never a perfect narrative of reality. There is no individual with a capacity to re-relay the event exactly the way it took place. It is only a good story when its output becomes a shared meaning. This shows a social reality element that is always embedded in every leadership dimension.

The speed at which events sometimes unfold coupled with the complexity and dynamic evolving nature of organisations make plausible reasoning realistic than accurate reasoning. A need to respond to fast unfolding events rules out the possibility of accuracy but still allows for reasonable interpretation for an acceptable action. In fact, plausible reasoning is not completely devoid of accuracy but embeds circumscribed accuracy. The reason why perception cannot be accurate is simply because by the time people reach a conclusion on the matter, it has already become something different. People construct what, at the same time, constructs them. As they enact the environment, the environment enacts them too.

The notion of sensemaking being driven by plausibility rather than accuracy provides a challenge to think beyond Weick's perspective. Organisations need rational decisions and not plausible ones. At the same time, accurate decisions are always in relative terms due to the complex nature of organisations. Scenario planning becomes an option to be explored as a leadership approach with possible scenarios for consideration in decision making. The sensemaking property of plausibility is a lesson to be avoided by leaders because in the process of sensemaking, they may fall into a trap of plausibility, as opposed to accuracy. Plausibility is

²⁰⁹ Weick, KE, 1995, p.57

²¹⁰ Weick, KE, 1995, p.55

a leadership demise and may plunge an organisation into crises. This too is elaborated in Chapter 5.

4.6 Conclusion

The main argument here is that sensemaking is presented as a theoretical framework or perspective to understand leadership as a dynamic process. The sensemaking perspective is not another theory of leadership. Weick argues that there is no such a thing as a theory that is characteristic of the sensemaking paradigm²¹¹. This is a paradigm shift from the dominant psycho-behavioural approaches to leadership which have resulted to a plethora of theories which could not be sufficient to provide a poignant account of leadership processes.

How sensemaking has been defined and its distinguished characteristics called properties of sensemaking provide a perspective of how people make sense, and this serves as a basis for a useful theoretical framework to examine effective leadership.

²¹¹ Weick, K.E. 1995, p.69.

Chapter 5

Leadership as Sensemaking in Action

5.1 Introduction

What has been argued in the preceding chapters is that notwithstanding complexities and sometimes frustrations characterised by endless efforts that are associated with leadership, it remains pivotal and a talking point in the life of every organisation. It serves as a bedrock for organisational performance. Consequently, a great deal of research work has gone into the study of leadership as a concept for organisational performance. The research work has yielded literature that focuses on theories and models for different organisational environments. Some of the theories and models have been tested to assess their effectiveness in the effectiveness of organisations.

Research work on leadership demonstrates that in most instances, leadership has been conceptualised in terms of the behaviours of individuals such as traits and styles of individuals. These characteristics have proven to be problematic and elusive objects of study. It has proven difficult to identify and explain them, and this has led to many other alternative theories. However, only a few traditional theories have been identified and discussed in this study to illustrate this, namely: trait, behavioural, situational/ contingency, transactional, great man, participative, transformational and power and influence theories.

What has been explained in the discussion of these theories is that all of them have been researched using an objectivist, socio-behavioural approaches but still left leadership partially

and inadequately explained. Consequently, their philosophical underpinning of leadership could not help better organisational leadership. They have not yielded to an approach that improves the understanding and application of leadership and its effectiveness.

However, literature on leadership has had a great influence on the structuration and re-structuration models of organisations. The evidence of organisational structuration is bureaucracy and hierarchical leadership organisational structures. Then again, leadership discourse remains a nemesis in organisations. This means there is still a gap. The gap is not necessarily in the incorrectness of the existing theories, hence any study that seeks to produce another theory may not close the gap. The gap that exists does not need another theory or theories. Instead, it requires a complimentary approach to the study of leadership. Such a complimentary approach is identified as the sensemaking theory in this study.

The sensemaking theory is examined as an alternative theoretical framework to be considered in all leadership discourses. It is not identified and perceived as another theory of leadership or organisational theory but does provide a theoretical framework which is a diagnosis of both cognitive and sociological behaviour of human beings. In fact, there is no organisational theory as discussed earlier on.

The sensemaking theory is preferred because of its theoretical framework which foregrounds decision making on human cognition. There are cognitive theories, but what makes the study relevant is linking up the cognitive dimension of human behaviour to leadership using insights from the sensemaking theory. The sensemaking theory provides an insight that behind the human activities lies human intelligence, cues and frames and quality of sense that, in the main, constitute leadership and make one a leader. Therefore, a sensemaking theory has all the elements that do not only explain what leadership is all about and the expected role of a leader but provides the conceptual analysis of leadership. This is particularly so because sensemaking is not perceived necessarily as comprehensive enough to address leadership enigma, but its framework provides insights that are applicable to effective leadership.

In order to contextualise the argument, the literature on leadership has been examined with a focus on theories of leadership such as the trait, situational/contingency, great man, behavioural, transactional, participative, power and influence and transformational theories. This has been followed by looking at an organisation as a system for leadership practices.

Leadership, as a phenomenon, never occurs in a vacuum, and the focus of the thesis is on organisational leadership. Therefore, literature on leadership is examined within the context of an organisation as a system.

The sensemaking theory, as propounded by Weick, is examined as an approach whose theoretical construct can help elucidate the leadership enigma for effective organisational leadership. Sensemaking meaning is analysed according to the seven properties construct. The seven properties are all about how people, on an on-going basis, construct meaning through the interpretation of situations in order to reduce ambivalence and equivocality of circumstances and objects. The implications of the seven properties of sensemaking have been examined, especially because they relate to organisations. Chapter 5 is, therefore, about identifying insights from sensemaking that are applicable to leadership and further discusses how such

52 Sensemaking and the Process Character of Leadership

Both sensemaking and leadership are activities that are process-driven and process-oriented. However, there is a special character attached to the process of sensemaking that happens when someone functions as a leader. The leader makes sense like all other people but at the same time, a leader's sensemaking must take into consideration the sense that non-leaders are making. The sense of non-leaders is not only considered but must be included and assimilated by the leader in the sensemaking process of the leader. This anticipation heightens the intensity of the leader's process in that it broadens the leader's frame of reference with respect to the purpose of the sensemaking process. It induces a process to leaders that it is not only sense for themselves but also on behalf of others who are non-leaders or followers.

The sensemaking that happens in a leadership context is, in this way, imbued with not only a different type of sensemaking but a broader focus as well than the usual one. It involves more people than usual, and because of that, it has a much longer process duration before some sort of consensus (i.e. plausibility) is achieved. This prolonged duration of sensemaking around a particular issue is noted for its continuous iteration.

However, it is also noted for the fact that the function of leadership implies the anticipation by all that are involved. There is some anticipation on the part of the leader to provide explicit formulations of sense. The anticipation is there from both the leader and the followers. This anticipation promotes a continuous iterative process towards decision making. The decision making invariably carries sentiments of a leader and non-leaders on the same issue. This is an

important contribution of sensemaking in leadership discourse which induces a paradigm shift and a new theoretical framework that complements the existing theories of leadership.

The process character aspect of leadership from the sensemaking theoretical construct is based on the fact people are continuously in search for answers on a number of issues they come across. These issues are naturally equivocal and therefore ambiguous. Their equivocality unleashes a sense of uncertainty which triggers a degree of discomfort to them. Inevitably, they become a center of attraction and a focal point. Naturally, any form of uncertainty would elicit a quest for the meaning construction. The meaning construction should imply an all-inclusive iterative and consensual process by the leader and non-leaders.

It is a process that is meant to bring some form of understanding and unequivocality. A process element in meaning construction is informed by how people engage any state or condition of equivocality. People observe what is before them against what they expect. Two separated yet integrated processes naturally unfold, namely: retrospective analysis of the situation and the breaking down of the matter into sizeable chunks to ease interpretation and understanding. The two processes constitute critical elements of the leadership process. Leadership is about a process of trying to interpret and understand any form of situation that unfolds. The sensemaking theory identifies and examines how such iterative processes take place.

Leadership involves the process where as people construct meaning, they also transmit meaning. There is no beginning and an end. Instead, there is an overlap between meaning construction and transmission. This overlap is continuous and of a process nature. This on-going process of meaning construction and transmission is sensemaking. When people construct meaning, they are making sense and when they transmit meaning to others, they are sense-givers. Leadership is about this process of making sense whilst giving sense to self and others. The responsibility of leaders is to guide people on how to construct and transmit meaning on an on-going basis

An insight into the process character of leadership through the sensemaking theoretical construct of leadership will rule out any possibility of autocracy. The process character of leadership precludes and eliminates dictatorial tendencies. It leaves everything open to many possibilities and as such, embeds evolution and adaptation. It embraces the fact that there is no one who knows it all. Leaders learn as they facilitate a path for followers. They too are part of the path making. Leaders do not decree from on high as if there is always a

predetermined solution to every challenge. The role of a leader becomes that of promoting a collective sensemaking process.

This process character approach defeats the notion that leaders know it all only by themselves. Instead, leadership becomes a two-way and interactive process rather than a linear and one-way event. It makes it not to be restricted to a formally appointed individual and designated group in an organization. It inculcates respect and shared learning from people in an organization. Furthermore, it inculcates a sense of pride and responsibility that irrespective of the stratum one is placed within the organizational hierarchy, he or she remains a valuable member that should actively participate in meaning construction and meaning transmission. Everyone becomes part of a process of sensemaking and sense-giving.

Leadership, as a process, makes it flexible. Rules and procedures do not restrict innovation and creativity from individuals. It leaves a room for independent thinking and knowledge application to individuals as they deem it relevant. People freely workout what they think would serve as the best solution to any quagmire according to the meaning they have constructed about the circumstances before them. Leadership is measured beyond the adherence to rules and procedures to finding solutions to challenges. This leadership practice results in almost and seemingly flat organizational structures and less hierarchies. It promotes team work to allow groups and individuals to share ideas and other best practices without constraints.

The character process to leadership has far reaching implications to leaders and followers. For instance, it would mean that leaders themselves should be open up to continuous learning which includes self-evaluation. They will learn from others and be able to assess themselves. As they assess themselves, there is some learning taking place. As leaders learn from themselves and followers, there is automatic self-improvement. This is the first double loop learning that takes place when leaders and followers share ideas to make sense together. In that process, there is learning from the other.

There is no better way to improve on leadership than to be able to look critically at your own beliefs and draw lessons for the future. This second double loop learning involves sense-giving and sense-transmission at the same time. Both leaders and followers are equally involved in sensemaking to provide strategic direction of the organization. Leadership becomes contextually relevant and an all-inclusive process. It ceases to become a static and event formula or designer method but a process that is dynamic, iterative and involving at the same time. Leaders effect whilst being affected by their followers.

However, the absence and lack of understanding and application of the character process of sensemaking breeds organisational bureaucracy. Bureaucracy often frustrates development because it is not only protracted but rigid. Not everyone is perceived as a role player in leadership process. Leaders themselves do not critically look at their beliefs or take into cognisance the cognitive understanding and contribution of others. They do not evaluate themselves, and there is no double loop learning. Leadership is made a fixated phenomenon for certain individuals, and the rank is often associated with leadership ability. Abrupt decisions are taken without any proper future forecast and views from non-leaders.

Consequently, leadership tends to evolve around mechanics, techniques, styles and personalities of individuals. It does not reflect how needs change when a crisis unfolds or how different coherent groupings form to meet the emerging challenges and lacks flexibility. Leadership practices and outcomes become predictable as if situations exist in an environment of certainties. Leadership tends to be linear and based on a cause and effect system of things. It becomes a way individuals react to the phenomena without a consideration of other peoples' views. The manner in which individuals are to react to different circumstances is narrowed down by the way in which it is prescribed, imposed and pre-determined for predictable outcomes. This makes leadership to be too rigid, reductionist and static in nature.

Furthermore, deepened bureaucracy makes organisations to be characterised by strict formalised hierarchies that are to be adhered to. Organisations are subjected to immutable rules, regulations and procedures. Structurally, they are characterised by separate divisions that are established along the lines of specialities. Leadership is weighed according to the levels of hierarchy. The higher the position one occupies, the greater the leader one is perceived to be. This also applies to the structures and divisions in organisations which are ranked according to their importance. Those that are categorised as important are given more powers than others. The issue of power is equated to and misconstrued with good leadership. The higher the position, the greater the power and the leader one becomes. This all makes leadership impersonal.

The implications of the absence of the process character of leadership from a sensemaking theoretical framework are that bureaucracies are not places where leadership can be expected. They are only engines that perform the same tasks day in and out. One does not expect decision making but only compliance to the already established performance schedules. This results into conflict when such organisations are given the task of decision making and have to incorporate leadership. They struggle to provide leadership outside the framework of rules and

daily routines. This is often the situation in the majority of the world's organisations today. In such a case, formal structuration of bureaucracies clash head-on with the flexible process character of sensemaking processes. The conclusion from this argument is, therefore, that it should not be the leadership that has to change but the structure of the organisation. The structure of the organisation should change such that it becomes possible to accommodate the process of sensemaking.

53 Frames and Cues in effective Leadership

Generally, leadership is a process of making sense to construct and give meaning to dilemmas, violated expectations, complexities, paradoxes and uncertainties. This can be made possible through the sensemaking theoretical framework because it recognises the fact that people never construct meaning out of a vacuum. They will always draw on something to construct and interpret a situation or objects. What they draw on constitutes the basis for the kind of interpretation and meaning construction they make.

The sensemaking theoretical framework identifies what people draw on as frames. These frames implicitly and explicitly serve as reference point to how the new meaning is constructed and interpreted. Frames are like contextualisation of a broad generality of things. They may include ideologies, paradigm, theories, tradition and stories. From both the explicit and implicit frames of reference reside many things such as activities, data, information and strategies. In sensemaking, such things are called cues. Cues make sense only through the lens of frames and not the other way round and serve as discrete properties of frames.

This means when leaders are conversant with frames and cues, their leadership becomes much more effective. They become aware that people draw their understanding of things from frames whether they are explicit or implicit. Frames provide a framework for people to interpret and construct meaning. Therefore as leaders, their role is first to identify and understand their frames from which they draw their understanding on. At the same time, they have to understand the frames from which other people draw their reference from. If such frames are limited or constrained, it would mean limited alternatives and perspectives. Then it becomes the role of leaders to broaden such frames. Broadened frames will enlarge the framework from which people draw their meaning. As their frames are broadened, people have more cues to choose from and make meaning on. Ultimately, their capacity to understand issues is enhanced. Broadened frames provide wider and new perspectives. New perspectives become new

alternatives that increase their level of understanding. New alternatives broaden peoples' horizon.

Through sensemaking, leaders do benefit from knowing about frames and cues. For instance, when they realise that they have limited insights into certain issues, they broaden their frames and cues. When they do that, their leadership capacity is enhanced. The scope to explore solutions is widened. Their approach and perspective on things get better. Broadened frames and cues enlarge their scope of thinking and viewing of diverse situations, and they never run out of new alternatives.

Therefore, the metaphor of frames and cues from the sensemaking theory has a significant role and contribution in effective leadership in the following ways:

5.3.1 Frames illustrate Assumptions of one's Environment

Frames and cues are common metaphors in the sensemaking theory. Frames are used metaphorically to illustrate one's assumptions that provide a framework for one's cues. Frames constitute the generalities and the total picture a person has about the particular environment. A cue is a metaphor for one's actions. They are specifics from one's total picture. In one of the seven properties construct of sensemaking, Weick uses the language of frames and cues as a way of drawing attention to assumptions with which people approach any matter. People identify cues from frames in order to draw assumption on what is unfolding. Leaders, being people like all the rest of others, bring their assumptions too.

Frames are an important metaphor in leadership environment. They are like an individual's belief system which predisposes a person's sensemaking activity. They are like a philosophy behind an individual's insight into the matter. Understanding frames in a leadership environment is, therefore, one of the critical necessities to leaders and non-leaders. They help people to see cues in the context of frames. Frames are an assumption and frame of reference from which actions are drawn. They are like a script from which the text is drawn.

Effective leadership involves identifying assumptions in one's environment as a frame of reference for one's viewpoint and decision making. The metaphor of frames from the sensemaking theory connects decision making to the frame of reference. This means when there are challenges with respect to the decision making process, the role of a leader is to broaden frames. Broadened frames create more options for consideration in a particular environment. Otherwise if there is continued ambiguity and uncertainties despite the existing frames, the broadening of frames provides a solution for a clearer picture.

Furthermore, non-leaders always look at what leaders do in terms of their actions. Very seldom do non-leaders focus on leaders' assumptions and what they bring as a form of action. The sensemaking theory brings the importance of the consideration of frames by non-leaders as being fundamental in influencing leaders' actions from their environment. They influence the choice of cues. This is significant to followers or non-leaders as their insight into leaders' assumptions help them to easily understand the leaders' actions. Frames provide a particular context for cues.

Knowing about frames places leaders in advantageous positions to broaden peoples' understanding on diverse issues that they need to respond to. This remains essential because effective leadership is based on the capability of leaders to give others a sense of what they are doing to such an extent that they are able to communicate the meaning they make on what they do to others. In other words, effective leadership includes people developing a capacity to be able to say why they do things the way they do. An answer to such a question only comes through an insight into sensemaking. Frames provide clues to answers.

Focusing on assumptions is not only important for followers. Leaders should be aware that good leadership requires self-understanding of one's own frames of reference. One's own frame of reference is indicative of one's biasness and subjective selectivity on matters. Understanding one's own assumptions and refining them, is the essence of double loop learning. People who learn and keep on learning master one of the most important skills required for life, which is cognitive adaptability to new circumstances. If a leader masters this skill, he/she is well on his/her way to becoming an effective leader. When a leader realises possible shortcoming from his/ her frames, it becomes the leader's responsibility to broaden his/ her frames. This is an important aspect of self-learning which plays a pivotal role in effective leadership. In other words, the metaphor of frames helps leaders to improve on their leadership through learning from themselves and helping followers to see leaders' actions from the assumptions that underpin them.

5.3.2 Cues illustrate Awareness of one's Environment

In sensemaking, cues are specific actions from generalities. In decision making, they serve as a metaphor for the breadth of one's awareness of one's environment. The actions indicate the extent to which leaders and followers have an insight into their environment. Low awareness means that one does not "see" many cues and one's expectation are low as one does not "see" many options.

An insight into cues helps leaders to broaden them when a need arises. This is what effective leadership means when the leader succeeds in broadening awareness by showing that there are more cues. When people are made aware of more cues, their options are broadened than they had realised and their level of understanding is deepened. This is an important element of effective leadership to enhance peoples' intellectual capacity for better actions. Broadened cues make non-leaders to be the masters in their own space of operation. It instills flexibility and creativity by exploring various options in diverse challenges.

5.3.3 Frames and Cues broaden the Capacity for Decision Making

Broadened frames and cues help leaders and followers not to necessarily find solutions only on simple matters. Organisations are complex entities in complex environments. Therefore, people face simply to complex matters which require decision making. The understanding of frames and cues help leaders and followers to have options for possible solutions in intricate circumstances. Broadened frames and cues create capacity for making decisions in complex environments. Furthermore, they enhance the capacity of leaders and followers in understanding that accuracy is always secondary to plausibility in any organ of decision making. Plausible reasoning goes beyond the observable and consensual information to form ideas and understanding that provide sufficient clarity. Therefore, a leader of sensemaking will allow meetings to draw conclusions on account of plausibility, pragmatics, coherence, reasonableness, creation, innovation and instrumentality. This takes place when a leader allows for an on-going process of interrogating an emerging story to make it comprehensive and credible to the majority of others. It takes a leader that is conversant with frames and cues to stimulate discussions knowing that the ideas of participants also imply the thinking of others. They serve both as representatives and a voice of reasoning for others. This makes leadership a social activity and a sense knowledgeable leader a facilitator of a social activity. The organisation becomes a social structure.

Broadened frames and cues enhance the leadership capacity of leaders during meetings. As part of any leadership function, the meetings serve as events and platforms for decision making. Meetings are necessary for organised and well-coordinated organisational activities²¹². They

²¹² Meetings are defined as a communicative event that organises interaction in distinctive ways. Most specifically a meeting is a gathering of three or more people who agree to assemble for a purpose ostensibly related to the functioning of an organisation or group, for example, to exchange ideas, or opinions, to develop policy and procedures, to solve a problem, to make a decision, to formulate recommendations, and the like. A meeting is characterised by multiparty talk that is episodic in nature, and participants develop or use specific conventions for regulating this talk....The meeting form frames the behaviour that occurs within it as

are a forum to generate, maintain and keep organisations focused and delivering on their mandates. Meetings serve as platforms that provide individuals with activities and a way to make sense of the activities and their relationship to each other. In this context, meetings are sense makers. This means they define and re-define, represent and reproduce organisations as social entities. When meetings are constituted, they too reconstitute organisations as members engage on items on the agenda. The essence of the organisation is made clearer and real through minutes, notes, policies and reports. This makes meetings an organisation in action as most organisational activities are planned in meetings.

Leaders will not run meetings effectively without the knowledge and application of frames and cues. In meetings, leaders serve as facilitators and, in the process, guide participants towards desirable decision making. For their effective role, they have to broaden the frames and cues of followers whilst at the same time, broadening their frames and cues to enhance their capacity to comprehend and explore new alternatives and perspectives to matters.

Furthermore, meetings serve as platforms where autonomic arousals often find expressions. Such autonomic arousals assume the form of arguments, contradictions, rebut, resistance to certain opinions. A sense-knowledgeable leader will not only make sense of the above but most importantly, will give sense to meeting participants. For instance, a sense-knowledgeable chairperson of a meeting will first establish meeting objectives such as decision making, brainstorming or information sharing. The meeting objectives are called frames in sensemaking. This exercise will enhance the capacity of followers. They influence the thinking and narrow the scope for engagement in order to remain focused on issues at hand.

A chairperson of the meeting will use the frames to connect the cues to frames and thus link the present to the past. In the process, the chairperson will allow as many cues as possible from participants as long as they are connected to the frames. The chairperson will have a facilitating role whose primary role is to fit in cues to frames for meaning-making. Meaning making foregrounds decision making.

However, in the event the chairperson notices disconnect between cues and the existing frames, sensemaking theory helps the chairperson to broaden frames so that all cues can be linked to frames. This is important in two ways: first, sense is only made when cues are interpreted according to frames. Secondly, the broadening of frames helps to prevent autonomic arousals

concerning the “business” or “work” of the group, or organisation, or society (Schwartzman cited in Weick, K.E, 1995. *Sensemaking*, p.143).

that may end up with unintended consequences. This means sensemaking theory enables leaders to steer meetings towards the right direction without stifling the discussion or being dictatorial over people.

There are many examples that demonstrate how broadened frames and cues of people help to improve people's capacity and understanding of new alternatives. For instance, a pilot would always announce that in the event of an emergency, people should be able to evacuate the flight through the emergency exits, use of oxygen masks and listening to the command of instructions. In this way, people are given new alternatives to apply in the event of an emergency. This improves the capacity of people to be safe through the use of alternative ways. The frames of people are broadened through enhanced leadership capacity provided by pilots.

Another example of the importance of how broadened frames and cues enhance leadership capacity is when the late and former State President of the Republic of South, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela came to the Rugby World Cup at Ellis Park stadium in 1995 in full Springbok regalia. He was walking side by side with Francois Pienaar, the then captain of the Springboks. The significance of this event is that first, it was at a time when South Africa's democracy was still very young and fragile. It was not more than two years old. Second, it was at a time when almost everybody was baying for the Springbok emblem to be destroyed and replaced. Third, rugby at that time was perceived as still a symbol of the privileged, racial divide and apartheid oppression. Consequently, reconciliation was on the brink of collapse. Civil war was simmering through a confrontational agenda, racial hatred and revenge.

The interpretation of reconciliation within the broader context of a Rainbow Nation was very minimal. This called for a need to broaden cues of reconciliation to fit into frames of a Rainbow Nation in order for the democracy to make sense to fellow South Africans of all racial groups. At the same time, there was a need of leadership that would broaden frames of reconciliation for fellow South Africans to fit in or connect their cues in order to make sense of reconciliation. Leadership was needed to rise up and be demonstrated above political differences and give sense to people to comprehend reconciliation for a better nation.

In the stadium, there were thousands of old South African flags in a new South Africa fluttering in the stands as the late former State President came on to the pitch. The scene was very much reminiscent of a nation divided against itself. There were both the old and new South African flags hoisted by the spectators. The scene was a symbol of a nation in transition. South Africa

was two nations in one. There existed both the old and the new South Africa at Ellis Park stadium.

At his appearance, noise suddenly stopped in great amazement. A few unsettling moments of silence remained for a while. Thereafter, a smattering applause erupted and grew spontaneously. The Rainbow Nation was apotheosised. This was leadership at best. Autonomic arousals were managed constructively. The crisis was averted. Peoples' sense of reconciliation as a means for a Rainbow Nation began to dawn. Peoples' cues of reconciliation in a democratic South Africa were enlarged.

The wearing of the Springbok jersey at the time when the majority of black South Africans were baying for its replacement did not only enlarge cues but broadened frames of reconciliation. The African National Congress (ANC) revisited its position on the Springbok jersey because of a new understanding of how reconciliation could be made a reality. The lesson learnt was that reconciliation never meant undoing everything that might have been the product of the past. The people of South Africa became convinced that the Springbok emblem still had a place in the future of the country. It would offer the new generation of South Africa a different meaning rather than burying it with skeletons of apartheid. The late former State President was both a sense-maker and sense-giver at the same time. This he did by broadening frames and cues of people. In the process, the leadership capacity of people was enhanced. From that day, arguments on the Springbok emblem started to die a natural death to this day.

54 Arguing and Leadership

Arguing in leadership discourse has no specific organisational leadership theory that fully embraces it as a positive contribution to organisational decision making and, therefore, a necessary process for consideration. Instead, it is commonly perceived in public circles as a breeding ground for chaos and a recipe for disaster. In organisations, arguing is commonly attributed to a failure on the part of leaders to stamp their authority and exercise control over people. Sometimes it is regarded as time wasting and a rudderless exercise that gives no meaning and takes the organisation nowhere. To other leaders, arguing is not different from insubordination and therefore a punishable offence. Consequently, this form of perception and attitude towards arguing ends up stifling robust debates and deprives people from speaking out their minds.

In sensemaking theory, Weick sees arguing differently. He sees it as a component of the belief and action driven processes as elaborated in Chapter 4 of the thesis. The sensemaking theory

induces a different perceptual view on arguing or argumentation. It regards an organisation as a social construct that is naturally prone to argumentation, interpretation, problem solving and decision making. It is characterised by divergent, antagonistic and imbalance forces that are woven in all the acts of sensemaking processes. The argumentation in sensemaking theory is a process to discover consensus and mutual understanding on matters of conflicting viewpoints. Arguing becomes a process to predispose sensemaking on various divergent issues in organisations. It is part of many processes to be used to clarify issues for better understanding. It is part of sensemaking and sense-giving processes.

A leader with sensemaking theoretical understanding will know that an organisation is a collection of people whose sole purpose is to continuously make sense of what is happening around them. These people come together as communities of practice to assume their organisational functions. The individuals have their own internal monologue which naturally invokes dialogue as a form of expressing their beliefs and actions. Normally, the dialogue is in the form of exchange of information and ideas. However, the dialogue can sometimes be a confrontation to other individuals' sense of purpose and contribution to the organisation. In such instances, things can get out of hand and autonomic arousal may ensue. A leader of sensemaking theory would not view this as an anomaly and, therefore, an organisational anarchy.

The sensemaking theory capacitates leaders on how to open and allow debates to go on at all levels. Their role is to guide such robust debates to remain focused, coordinated and be within context in order to culminate to certain conclusions that demonstrate better understanding of issues. As people interact continuously at generic subjectivity and extra-subjectivity levels in organisations, arguments get narrowed down. People find one another through understanding the context of their enlarged cues. Hunches are fleshed out from specifics and generalities to generate a common and coherent understanding.

This approach to leadership inculcates a culture of maximum participation and collective decision making which engenders organisational unity. Arguing is neither compromised nor perceived in the negative light but is allowed and kept focused, constructive and decent. Ultimately, this enables people to think out of the box as they know that their arguments are never squashed but rather taken seriously. As long as the leader knows how to facilitate arguing as part of leadership discourse through broadened frames and cues, leadership will prevail over issues.

In some instances, the exchange of information in an organisation can be heated debate. When it is heated debate anger, sulking and slamming of doors can take place. If such remain unabated, it may signify the end of argumentation. Anger discontinues argumentation as it degrades the quality of engagement as a result of heightened arousal. Insight into the importance of arguing from the sensemaking theory provides guidance on how to view and manage arguments as part of forms of constructive engagements in effective leadership.

Part of organisational leadership includes the creation of structures that will serve as platforms for discussions towards shared meanings. The importance of shared meaning is to provide social cohesion, coordinated efforts, more clarity and unity of purpose. Shared meaning ultimately serves as a springboard for order and stability whilst at the same creating opportunities for innovations. However, shared meanings are not easily arrived at. Sometimes there are arguments that are characterised by robust debate, heightened or flared tempers and exchange of fists which may ultimately cripple the organisation if not properly managed through guidance.

Therefore, sensemaking enables leaders to view arguing as a necessary and socially acceptable way to interrogate issues not to cripple the organisation but instead, to reduce ambivalence and contradictions that may hide clarity over issues. It is a form of involving followers to be active participants towards decision making. Sensemaking provides a way in which arguing is first perceived in a positive light and second, as a way of building shared meaning and values. Arguing normally ensues from meetings and through sensemaking, leaders are able to run such meetings and are able to allow debates but, at the same time, guide the discussions towards shared meanings. Sometimes leaders are required not only to persuade but to be persuaded too, and sensemaking enables leaders to manage such situations with success.

In a nutshell, arguing from the sensemaking theoretical framework promotes constructive engagements which are critical in conflict resolution and building a shared understanding on matters. It enhances peoples' insight on issues through the exchange of information and enrichment of cues. The more people debate, the clearer the picture becomes on issues.

55 Structuring the Unknown for effective Leadership

In this context, the unknown refers to the present problems for which no answers have been found yet. In organisations, the unknown are untenable situations as they breed uncertainties. Part of the leadership function is to de-complex issues to create future directions. The sensemaking theory is a useful framework in this regard as it is about making sense of the

unknown. In fact, the sensemaking theory lends strong theoretical support to scenario based planning, which is one of the approaches used to structure the unknown.

Leadership is both a system and a process to structure the unknown. It is a system in the sense that it involves a set of things working together to construct order and meaning out of a complex environment. Leadership is a process because it is not an abrupt and a once-off phenomenon but rather, a series of integrated steps and coherent actions towards a particular objective. As a system and process, leadership involves steps and actions that seek to navigate complexities and unravel the unfettered ground. Through this process, the unstructured gets orderly and systematically arranged, and the unknown becomes clearer and understandable. Organisational mysteries are de-mystified to create a sense of purpose and direction.

When structuring the unknown, the leadership provides a way to reach the unequivocality and direction in an environment where the ultimate control is zero or minimal. It is a way in which clarity and purpose are achieved in situations that are abnormal. A leader would embody the possibilities of escape from what might otherwise appear to us to be incomprehensible or from what might otherwise appear to some as a chaotic, indifferent or incorrigible world.

The structuring of the unknown is justified because an organisation is a system located in an environment that can be fluid and unpredictable sometimes. Organisational management tools such as rules, procedures and policies are largely based on past experiences. They are crafted in anticipation that the future would remain as at when they were developed. Even organisational strategic plans which try to forecast the organisation cannot predict with certainty that every strategy will remain relevant as at when it was forecast. This means that none of these tools can be fully relied upon as both the organisations and their environment are dynamic. The implication of this is that there is no leadership theory that is used to guide the development of these tools as a guiding theoretical framework for organisational leadership.

Notwithstanding the inadequacy of the relevant organisational leadership theories, there is a need for a leadership theoretical framework to guide leaders on how to traverse the unfamiliar and unknown organisational terrains. Sensemaking theory contains vital elements that help leaders to thrive well in such terrains of uncertainties and unpredictabilities. In sensemaking theory, they are generally referred to as properties of sensemaking. They help to structure the unknown through identity construction, retrospective process, social construct and a process driven by plausibility rather than accuracy as examined below.

56 Structuring the Unknown through Lessons from the Properties of Sensemaking

In Chapter 4 of the thesis, the seven properties of sensemaking were identified and discussed. Weick identified and examined them as a construct that can be used to explain the meaning of sensemaking. They provide insights into various interconnected activities that explain how sensemaking generally unfolds. Weick has not examined the properties of sensemaking within the context of leadership. From his perspective, they explain how sensemaking works consciously or unconsciously to every individual. His emphasis is the fact that when individuals make sense, they are engaged in identity construction, enactment, social engagement, continuous processes, plausibility seeking, retrospection and focused on frames and cue extraction. However, what is argued here is that the jargon of the properties of sensemaking remains useful in effective leadership. For example, if the leaders see their actions through the lens of properties of sensemaking, they will understand them better. They will know what to do if the equivocality still persists.

For instance, what can be extrapolated from the property of enactment is the fact that it deals with the relationship between the core and the context. The idea here is that a sense-maker is in a constant process of configuring the context and, in turn, being configured by the context. The action that a person takes makes an impact on the context, and the new context impacts on the actions of the sense-maker as well. A typical example is the change of the political landscape in South Africa after the 3rd of August 2016 local government election results. The picture portrayed is that parties changed the political context, and the new political context is now changing parties.

What this implies is that followers expect their leaders to play a pivotal role in defining and changing the context. Effective leadership in this sense is about being able to define and change the context. Leaders, on the other hand, should know that defining and changing the context is what is expected of them. This, in a way, places on leaders an intense type of enactment that the people they lead require. Effective leadership becomes a responsibility of enactment through defining and changing the context.

In the property of retrospective sensemaking, leaders are to learn that effective leadership requires objectivity in every way possible. This is not what retrospective sensemaking is about. Instead, it is about looking back to the past in order to choose selectively what one wants with the purpose of justifying the choice that one has already made. This is done to legitimise the present situation.

True leadership resists the retrospective process because of its subjectivity through its selective approach. The selective approach actually distorts the reality. In fact, if retrospect is left unchecked, it has a tendency to guarantee wildly fictitious beliefs which are biased and unrealistic. Effective leadership requires leaders to confront the cues and only fall back as a way of filtering cues in order to see what remains. Therefore, the retrospective process is important but not for practice except to be avoided in order to ensure that there is effective leadership.

As indicated in Chapter 2 of the thesis, leadership is a complex process whose aim is to bring order, stability and maximum output in an organisation through individual performance. This aim is achieved through making and giving sense to the organisational environment. The process of making and giving sense to the organisational environment summarily structures the unknown. Leaders are charged with a responsibility to be the facilitators of this process. However, the challenge is whether the unknown can be structured through a process of plausibility or accuracy. The process of plausibility is idealist in nature whereas the process of accuracy is realist. The realist is foregrounded on an accurate relay of a phenomenon.

The challenge is whether the tendency to look for plausibility rather than accuracy truly defines effective leadership. The sensemaking theory does not say when one makes sense, it means it is good or bad. The theory is neutral about the usefulness of the phenomenon of sensemaking. It is non-committal on the typology of sense that is being made. The theory focuses on the fact that people make sense anyway, whether good or bad. Therefore, the theory is not about the quality of sense; it is more about the process of sensemaking.

However, the usefulness of the property of plausibility than accuracy in leadership is that leaders are to guard against looking for plausibility. Leaders have to be acutely aware that if plausibility is the only target, there will be severe loss of cues. Therefore, leaders should not target plausibility. They must, as true leaders, broaden the scope of cues and ensure that selectivity is overcome as far as possible so as to be accurate and get to the truth of things. In so doing, the leader goes against how people would like to make sense against what seems plausible. That makes such a person a true leader.

57 Sensemaking as not just another Theory of Leadership

Chapter 2 of this study presents a synopsis on the developmental leadership trajectory together with the subsequent leadership theories. All the theories identified and examined do not only attest to the significance of leadership but also a trend in efforts to address leadership gaps

through the development of theories. However, the proliferation of leadership theories has proved to be insufficient to respond to the leadership gaps, notwithstanding its significance. This illustrates the fact that there is no single theory that could be sufficient to explain and provide deep insights to the leadership process. Furthermore, this points to a reality that what is needed is not another theory but rather, a theoretical framework that can be used to explain the leadership phenomenon. Otherwise the leadership phenomenon will remain complex and elusive. Organisations will remain not only without an organisational leadership theory but also an appropriate theoretical framework to predicate and reference leadership processes. This gap constitutes the basis and rationale for sensemaking to be chosen as an appropriate theoretical framework to be used to understand the organisational leadership process.

As explained in Chapter 1, the sensemaking theory is not presented and examined as another theory of leadership. It is rather presented and examined as an appropriate theoretical framework that can be used to explain the leadership phenomenon. The sensemaking theory does not even address the strengths and weaknesses of the existing leadership theories, as explained in Chapter 4 of this study. Nonetheless, since there is no single identified theory that can best de-complex the abstract leadership phenomenon, sensemaking is presented as an alternative framework that provides deeper insights into how people construct meaning and enact reality on an on-going basis. It only argues that people make sense every day of their lives. The process of sensemaking is on-going. The importance and relevance of the sensemaking theory in leadership discourse is that it identifies people as sense-makers and sense-givers and further extrapolates moments of sensemaking and sense-giving.

The insights of the sensemaking theory are necessary and relevant even for better understanding of the existing leadership theories. It is not a theory that undermines the basic tenets of the theories on leadership out there. It is rather a framework that even in the absence of new leadership theories, the leadership process would remain understood and applied correctly. The sensemaking theory is broad and involves all elements that play a part in influencing the interpretation of realities from sociological, cognitive and cultural perspective. Furthermore, it is a theory that remains relevant in spite of the dynamic and evolving nature of circumstances.

58 Leadership as a cascaded Function in Sensemaking Theory

In Chapter 2 of the thesis, it is explained that since inception, leadership has been conceptualised along the notion of hierarchical structures. This notion has resulted in deepened

organisational bureaucracies. In organisational bureaucracies, participants inherit explanations of what they are doing rather than being allowed to construct them on an on-going basis. The limitation with respect to these inherited explanations is that explanations tend to be out of sync, outdated, tedious, mechanical, disconnected and disjointed from meaning and reality. This further militates against the very fabric and nature of an organisation which is that of an engaging social construct on an on-going basis. The sensemaking theoretical framework foregrounds leadership as a cascaded function. A cascaded function allows for the distribution of roles and responsibilities to all individuals within the organisation. It recognises that everyone has a leadership function within an organisation and thus, a leader. If everyone is a leader, it means he or she is a decision maker. This is a very important paradigm shift in leadership discourse when it is viewed as a distributed function. It shows the importance and relevance of sensemaking theory in leadership.

A leader with sensemaking theoretical knowledge will use the distributed leadership functionality to inculcate synergy and coordination among and between organisational components. In achieving this, sensemaking theory uses the human body metaphor as the best illustration to explain how organisations should function. In sensemaking theory, an organisation like a human body is a single entity but with many different parts. Even though different parts are distinct and complete on their own, they form part of the whole. A part is not a whole on its own. The whole is the organisation. This understanding is critical in organisational leadership because it helps different levels and structures in an organisation to function within the broader context of a whole. It puts an emphasis on optimal organisational output as being consequential to the contribution of the parts of the organisation.

However, the sensemaking theory does acknowledge the fact that sometimes, there are tensions between different organisational structures. These tensions can be uncontrollable unless mediated. In sensemaking theory, such tensions often exist between the generic subjective and inter-subjectivity levels of the organisations. The levels of sensemaking are explained in Chapter 4. Such tensions are managed through the establishment of relationship patterns between parts for the success of the whole. Part of the relationship patterns includes coordination through joint planning sessions, reports and open communication channels between various divisions of the organisation. This organisational perspective challenges different individuals and organisational units to contribute meaningfully because they know they count towards optimal organisational performance. They all want to see their contributions

in the total organisational output. Ultimately, this coordinated approach instills organisational unity. This would make leadership become relevant and succeed in a dynamic environment.

Understanding of distributed leadership helps leaders to see organisations as being engaged in an on-going interacting process just like the body parts. This understanding challenges leaders to seek ways to keep themselves abreast of all organisational developments. It also helps leaders to facilitate platforms for constructive engagements on organisational matters. In so doing, leaders find themselves facilitating interactive interchange which potentially enhances meaning for individuals. These platforms could be both formal and informal. A leader with an understanding of sensemaking theory will determine ways to filter through these engagement outcomes so that they find space in appropriate formal structures to enable decision-making by leaders. Organisations are organs of decision making which should be facilitated by leaders. Failure in this approach often leads to organisational bureaucracies.

Besides the synergy and coordination role of distributed leadership, it is a devolved function in an organisation. This means it is both a top-down and bottom-up process. By so doing, it becomes a cascaded function throughout the organisation. The sensemaking theory embraces every individual as a decision-maker. Sensemaking recognises both the tacit and explicit knowledge that individuals bring to organisations. Therefore, each individual is assumed to possess some kind of insight and belief that, when shared, can help improve organisational efficiency.

It is this understanding that can make leadership not to be confined to certain individuals and levels within an organisation but rather a cascaded phenomenon. The sensemaking theory engenders a notion that every organisational employee has a role to play. That role requires some form of decision making in one way or the other. This makes an employee a leader in his or her own right. Through an understanding of the sensemaking theory, each individual's capacity in decision making is enhanced rather than discouraged.

When everyone becomes a leader through the distributed function of leadership, this instills authority and ownership of the decisions taken. Leadership becomes a shared and collective responsibility, and this results in collective ownership of decisions taken. In the process, individuals learn from one another and thus enrich their capacities. Individuals get motivated in the process without necessarily using other dominant forms of incentives. This is a major difference from other theories where the emphasis for organisational performance relies

heavily on other forms of incentives such as performance appraisals, bonuses, recognition certificates.

The cascaded leadership function plays another influential role in the design of the organisational structure. Other leadership theories, as identified and examined in Chapter 2 of the thesis, put more emphasis on hierarchal organisational structure with minimal or no feedback loop. Leadership function and decision making powers are associated with the levels of hierarchy within organisations. The higher the hierarchy, the greater the leadership responsibility and powers one has. However, the sensemaking theoretical construct engenders a flat organisational structure because the leadership responsibility is not structural more than individual based. Each individual, irrespective of the position one holds, is a decision maker. This approach makes every individual a valuable organisational member.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

From the above discussions, a conclusion can be drawn that leadership remains, undeniably, a nerve center for organisations, governments, communities and societies if they are to be stable and on the competitive edge of the global economy. Evidence of this is the growing literature on leadership theories and models and the increasing level of awareness and emphasis on the significance of leadership as a key driver for organisational success. Furthermore, there is generally a growing concern about leadership and leadership capacity for the future sustainability of organisations. This growing concern is notwithstanding the continued growing literature and research on leadership, particularly organisational leadership. This demonstrates that there is still a void to be filled and does not need another or other theories of leadership.

The existing leadership theories and models upon which the current leadership practices are based are not necessarily irrelevant more than being insufficient. Their insufficiency is based on the fact that they only foreground the leadership concept on certain behaviours of the individuals called leaders in organisations. The leadership concept is confined to the activities that people embark on. They associate the concept of leadership with positions of power, and this has constituted the basis for hierarchical organisational structures with poorly defined and disjointed feedback loops. This has resulted in a silo approach where parts are not in sync with each other in order to form the whole. Such a leadership approach engenders an unhealthy relationship and competition between parts of the organisation.

Leadership theories, as examined in Chapter 2, exclude the organisational environment which is dynamic, complex and unpredictable. The organisational environment cannot be left out of the leadership enigma because it shapes the organisation whilst the organisations shape it as well. Therefore, a leadership theoretical construct which is broad and flexible is necessary to produce effective leadership under such circumstances.

The other important aspect that the dominant leadership theories fail to recognise is the fact an organisation is a knowledge-based entity with employees that possess vast knowledge and experience. They bring their own individual intelligence to the organisation whilst their role in the organisation improves their intellectual capacity. Their intellectual capacity enables them to have their own worldview and belief system that predicates the decision making. The worldview creates a frame of reference from which to extract cues that predispose actions. The dispersed knowledge and expertise of knowledge workers throughout the organisation require a work environment that is flexible for independent thinking, innovation and creativity. The neglect of the existence of such knowledge and expertise in workers compromises and limit the quality of leadership in the sense that it ends up being confined only to a few individuals called leaders, yet followers have leadership capacity and responsibilities as well.

An insight and appreciation of the intellectual capacity of workers brings to play the process aspect on leadership. Process driven leadership means that decision making should be an outcome of participation by followers and leaders. The consensus seeking approach means there will always be delays in arriving at the appropriate actions at any given situation. However, the beauty of this approach is that there is collective ownership of the decision making. It instills learning and sharing of information between leaders and followers. As there is this learning from the other, there is cross-transfer of skills. This further rules out any possibilities of autocratic forms of leadership.

The sensemaking theoretical construct brings important concepts which foreground effective leadership. These concepts are frames and cues. There is no leadership theory that recognises the importance of frames and cues in decision making as they constitute the basis for effective leadership. Frames are a framework from which people draw their meaning construction for decision making. The role of leaders is to understand the metaphor of frames and develop the

ability to broaden them to enhance the understanding and decision making in various organisational activities such as meetings and strategic planning. Broadened frames accommodate divergent views which may be in the form of arguments in order to avert autonomic arousal. Cues are specific actions from frames.

The other important fact is that every organisation is a social adaptive and open system that should focus on processes and controls than structures. A focus on structure constrains the organisation from adapting and self-organising especially during times of difficulties. An organisational structure limits the roles and responsibilities of individuals because structures make organisations rational systems. They do not make organisations flexible in order to adapt when the need arises.

If organisations are viewed as systems that adapt and evolve, it would mean they require a leadership approach that is process driven than the structural centred one. Such a leadership approach cannot be based on one theory more than a theoretical construct that allows for processes that are based on human cognition. This means any solution to the organisational leadership dilemma should entail the recognition of organisations not as routine systems. Instead, it should be a leadership type that recognises organisations as complex evolving systems. They are systems that learn and adapt at the same time. A failure to perceive organisations in this way will result into the evolution of leadership theories that are predicated upon the mechanisation of human cognition and behaviour. Such a leadership theory will always serve as the basis for organisational bureaucracy.

Organisational bureaucracy breeds routinized processes as if people are like machines that are used for production. However, if organisations are viewed as systems that learn, adapt and evolve, then that would allow for a theoretical construct that is broad enough, flexible and relevant for the leadership in the organisation that is dynamic and the environment within which they exist. In this thesis, a framework is referred to as the sensemaking theoretical framework. It is a framework that can provide clues for effective organisational leadership.

Furthermore, organisations serve as building blocks for sensemaking. They provide context that predisposes a particular reasoning to organisational members at all levels. For instance, they provide frames from which to draw cues to construct meaning. Frames are like strategic

generalities that provide a total picture from which to draw the specifics for decision making. If organisations are understood as substances of sensemaking, it would mean there is no single organisational leadership theory that can be sufficient on its own. What is needed is like a leadership organisational theory of all theories whose characteristics permeate the existing theories. The sensemaking theoretical construct provides such an alternative.

The sensemaking theory has been identified, proposed and examined as a theoretical construct that does not critique the existing leadership theories or become another theory of leadership. It is a theoretical construct that predicates leadership on human cognition. By predicating leadership on human cognition, it provides an alternative approach to effective organisational leadership. The sensemaking theory is not just another theory of leadership as there is no organisational theory.

The sensemaking theory is recommended as a key leadership theoretical framework for a world of complexities, uncertainties and continuous change because of its recognition of leaders and followers as sense-makers. This means they are the meaning makers. Their actions are enshrined in the meaning they make of the situations at hand. As sense-makers, they read situations, interpret and make meaning of them. The properties of sensemaking provide a comprehensive process towards the meaning making process by all individuals. It is the meaning that leaders and followers make of situations that inform their actions.

The sensemaking theory recognises that leadership is about the ‘best’ decision constructed and arrived at through the meaning the leader has on the situation. Meaning-making is grounded on lived experience, environmental influence, social activities, what the leader and follower believe in and expect to see out of the situation. It provides a leadership perspective that recognises the experience that people have, the implicit and explicit knowledge they have and their independent and creative thinking whilst, at the same time, paying attention to the impact the decision making will have upon others.

This means leaders and followers read, interpret and take decisions within the context of the plurality of themselves. They consider the impact the decision will have upon the rest of other people. Therefore, they try by all means to arrive at a sense that other people would have possibly arrived at. The net effect of this is that their decision becomes other people’s decision.

This means that their thoughts are infiltrated by others because there is a recognition of the fact that the level of acceptance of a decision is highly dependent on the extent to which others have been made part of the thinking behind such a decision. It is only through sensemaking theoretical framework that such leadership actions are arrived at.

The sensemaking theory can be used as an assessment tool for organisational and individual performance. At an organisational level, leaders can use sensemaking to evaluate staff performance and customer satisfaction levels. It will help them to understand why their teams are not functioning, their customers leaving and operations underperforming. At personal level, sensemaking can help in understanding why leaders fail to live up to expectations.

The sensemaking theory is an answer to some perplexing behaviour patterns that are common in most organisations. They include ostensible information gathering that is never fully utilised for decision making, reports on development that are never read, policy formulations that lack implementation and rights to participate in decision making forum but never exercised to the fullest. Decision makers spend most of their time in meetings, but one never sees the resultant impact thereof. Effective leadership continues to fade away, and organisations plunge into crisis after another. The net effect with respect to leadership is not visible. These behaviour patterns make organisational leadership questionable.

This situation can be attributed to the lack of interpretation and meaning making, which is the core of sensemaking. The sensemaking theory foregrounds leadership on the sense that leaders have on situations. Leaders must be meaning makers. For them to make meaning, they must reason out and interpret situations to a point that they arrive at a particular meaning which constitutes the basis for action. Sensemaking does not preclude the beliefs of leaders about the nature of things. Beliefs help to give meaning through interpretation to various things in organisations.

In fact, sensemaking is an integral part of organisations. Organisations are an emergent from sensemaking and provide substance for sensemaking. Actions from sensemaking influence the nature of organisations. This means there is a cause-effect relationship between organisations as contextual mechanisms and the meaning making processes as transformational mechanisms.

This relationship makes sensemaking pivotal for effective leadership both at the inter-subjective micro-level and extra-subjective macro-level. Leaders have to embrace sensemaking as a perspective and a leadership approach for effective organisational transformation at all levels.

The sensemaking theoretical framework provides a major contribution at the strategic level of the organisation. At a strategic level, the role of leadership is to bring about the strategic change. An organisational strategic change is a planned change by members of the organisations. This would happen when leaders influence organisational members to exercise their independent thinking towards making the necessary changes in their own areas of operations as they make sense to them. Coupled with this is their explanation to others as to why they do things the way they do them. This promotes better understanding of roles and new ways of doing things. Organisational members become active participants in co-visioning and co-construction of the practices that are consistent with the vision. The new ways of doing things is made a shared responsibility. Sensemaking becomes the process by which new ways of thinking and acting get incorporated in organisational practices.

The sensemaking theory, which is not an organisational theory, provides important tools for effective leadership. These tools are not prescriptive and are thus suitable for any organisational situation. In Chapter 4, these tools have been outlined as frames and cues in the context of sensemaking processes. However, Chapter 5 has focused on the application of frames and cues towards effective leadership.

Finally, organisations are not necessarily a product of the book. They are all borne out of a human beings' cognitive ability. Rules, procedures and policies are developed to engender a common approach and a culture in the conduct of people and the execution of certain routine activities. However, effective leadership which is pivotal in keeping the organisation at the competitive edge during normal and crisis situations and in ensuring organisational survival in the near future is necessary. Effective leadership is 'sensemaking put to action'. Therefore, sensemaking must be made part of the assessment to determine one's leadership capabilities. Certain questions should be formulated to assess whether candidates are sense-makers or not.

Background checks for candidates should also consider sensemaking abilities. Guidelines could be the properties of sensemaking in formulating such questions and assessment tools.

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